



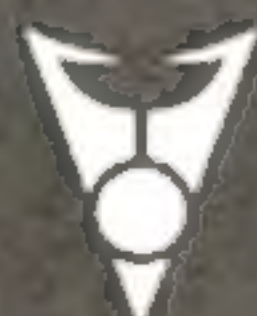
Foreword By  
**REBECCA  
SUGAR**

Written By  
**CHRIS  
MCDONNELL**

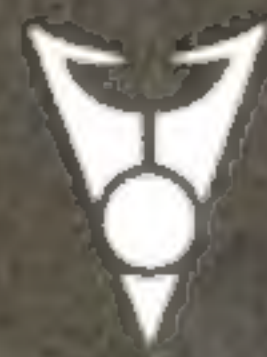
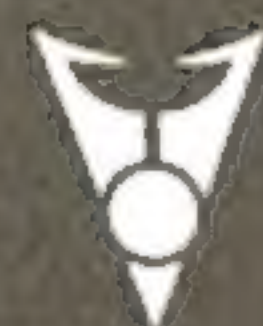


# THE ART OF **INVADER ZIM**

















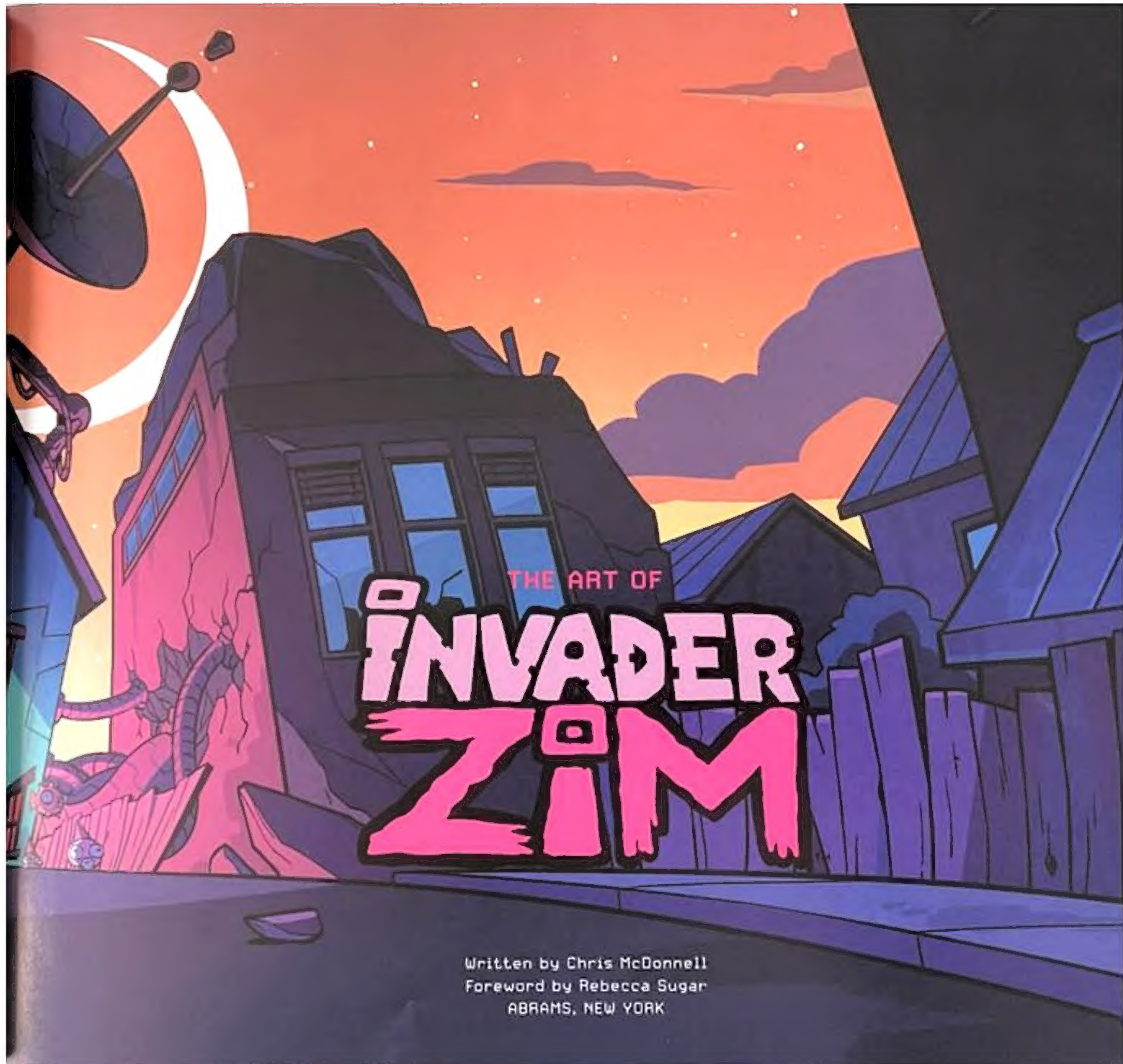
# INVADER ZIM™











THE ART OF  
**INVADER  
ZIM**

Written by Chris McDonnell  
Foreword by Rebecca Sugar  
ABRAMS, NEW YORK





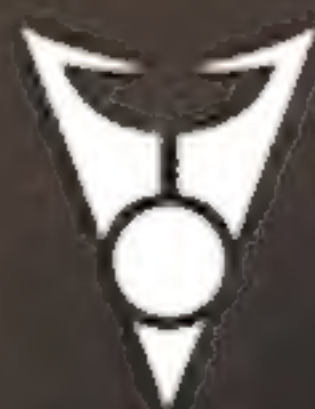




ZIM DISGUST

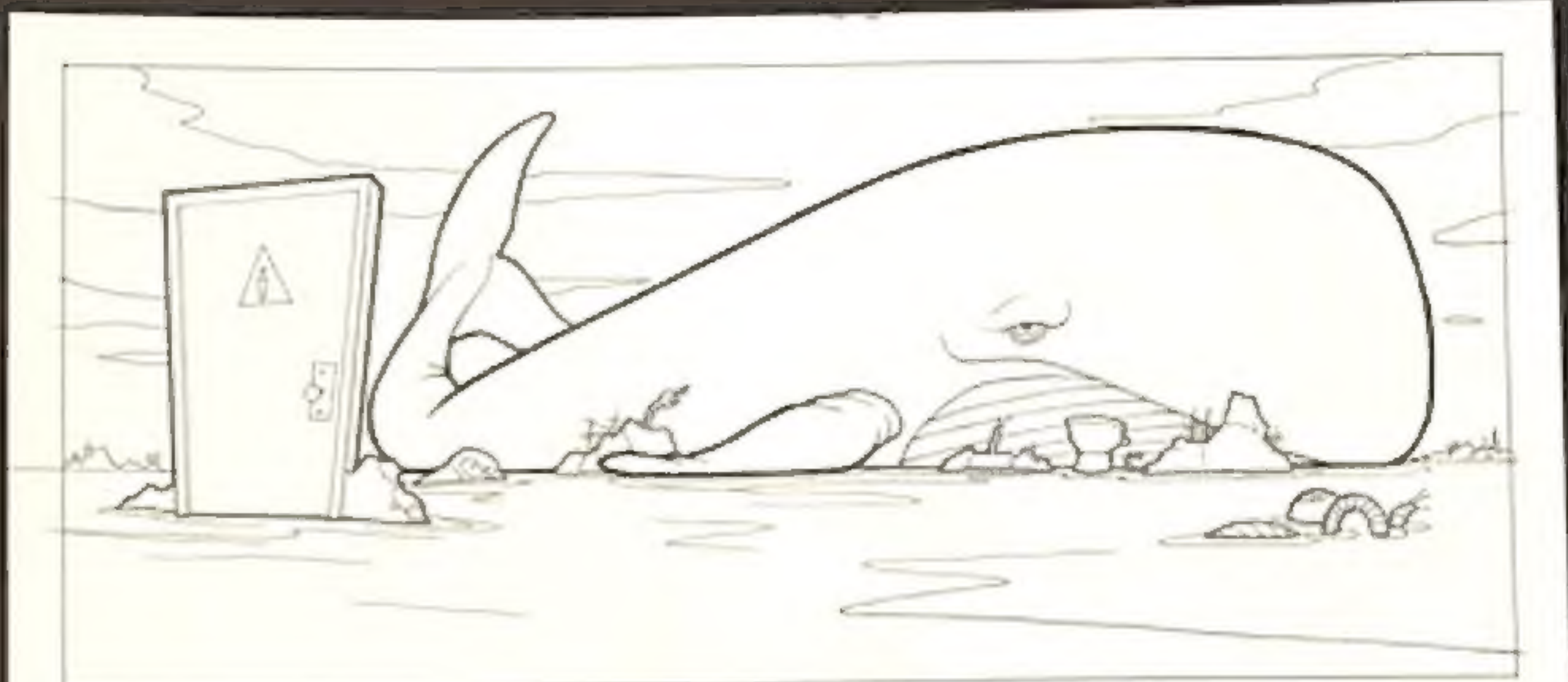


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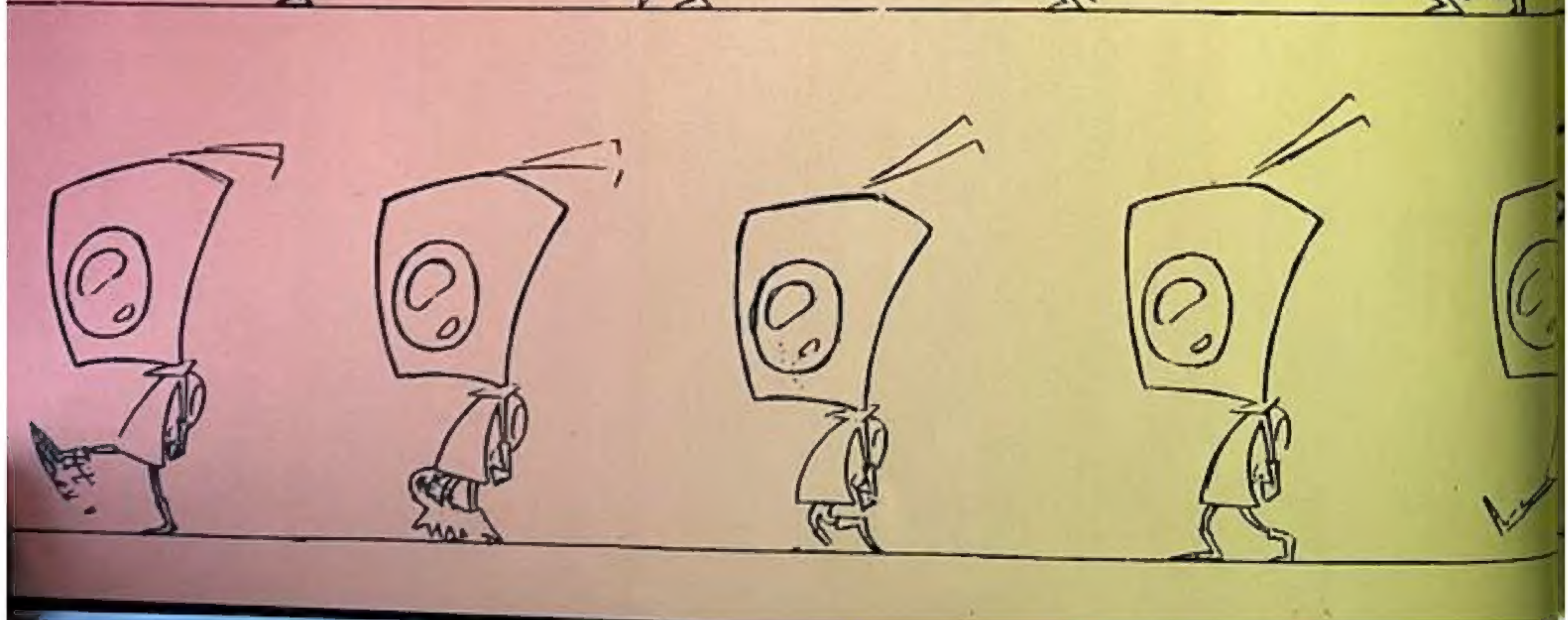
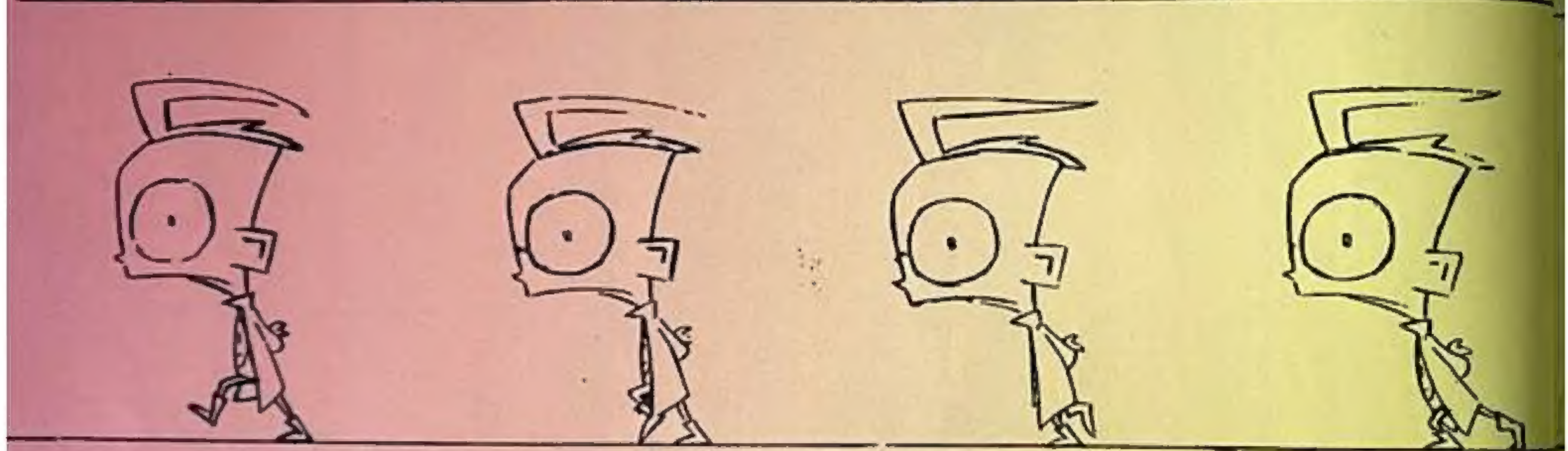
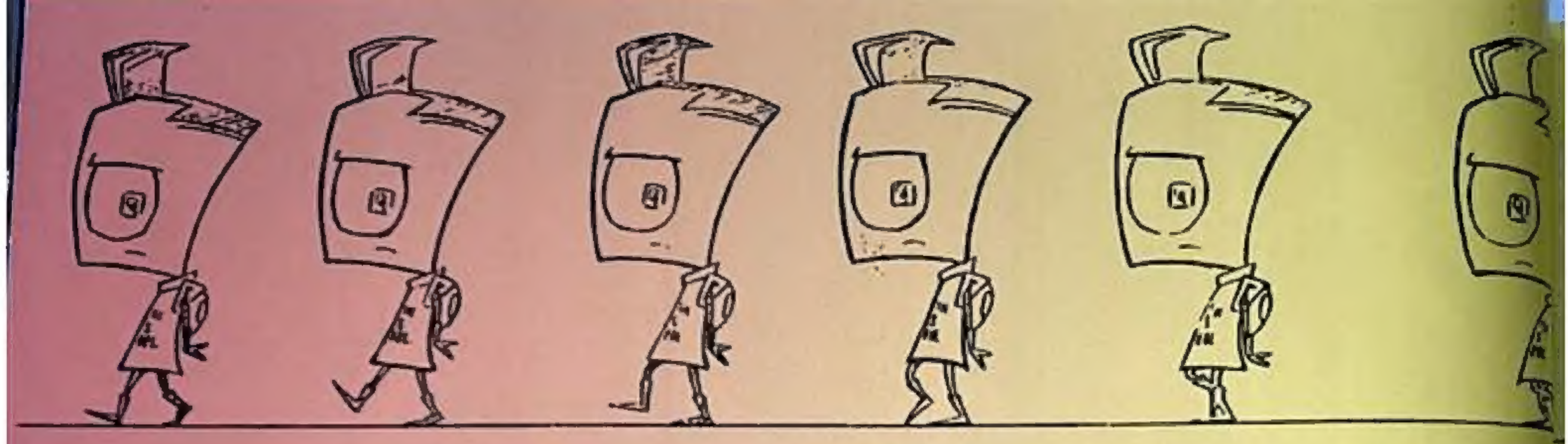


WETTERING

EXT. SANITIZED ABYSSAL CHAMBER  
OF THE HOUSE

SHOOT # 105A  
SC. 339  
BOZSI









## FOREWORD

BY REBECCA SUGAR

When I get a chance to meet fans of my cartoon *Steven Universe*, there's usually a lot of crying and hugging involved. I'm often asked if I'm surprised by the intensity of the fanbase. But I'm not surprised at all. It's something I truly understand, because of *Invader Zim*.

The nineties weren't the best time to be a queer kid. I entered middle school cautiously optimistic, and came out the other side sure that I was unlovable garbage. Worst of all, unlike most of my classmates, I didn't stop liking cartoons, so I was also a nerd, which at the time was not at all cool. But then, suddenly, like fate, there was *Invader Zim*. Its particularly misanthropic point of view hit me at exactly the right time. There was something about Dib especially—his ability to see the obvious and incredible truth while all the other kids went along obliviously with their lives really struck a chord with me. It reminded me of my own obsession with cartoons, which began to pool entirely into *Zim*.

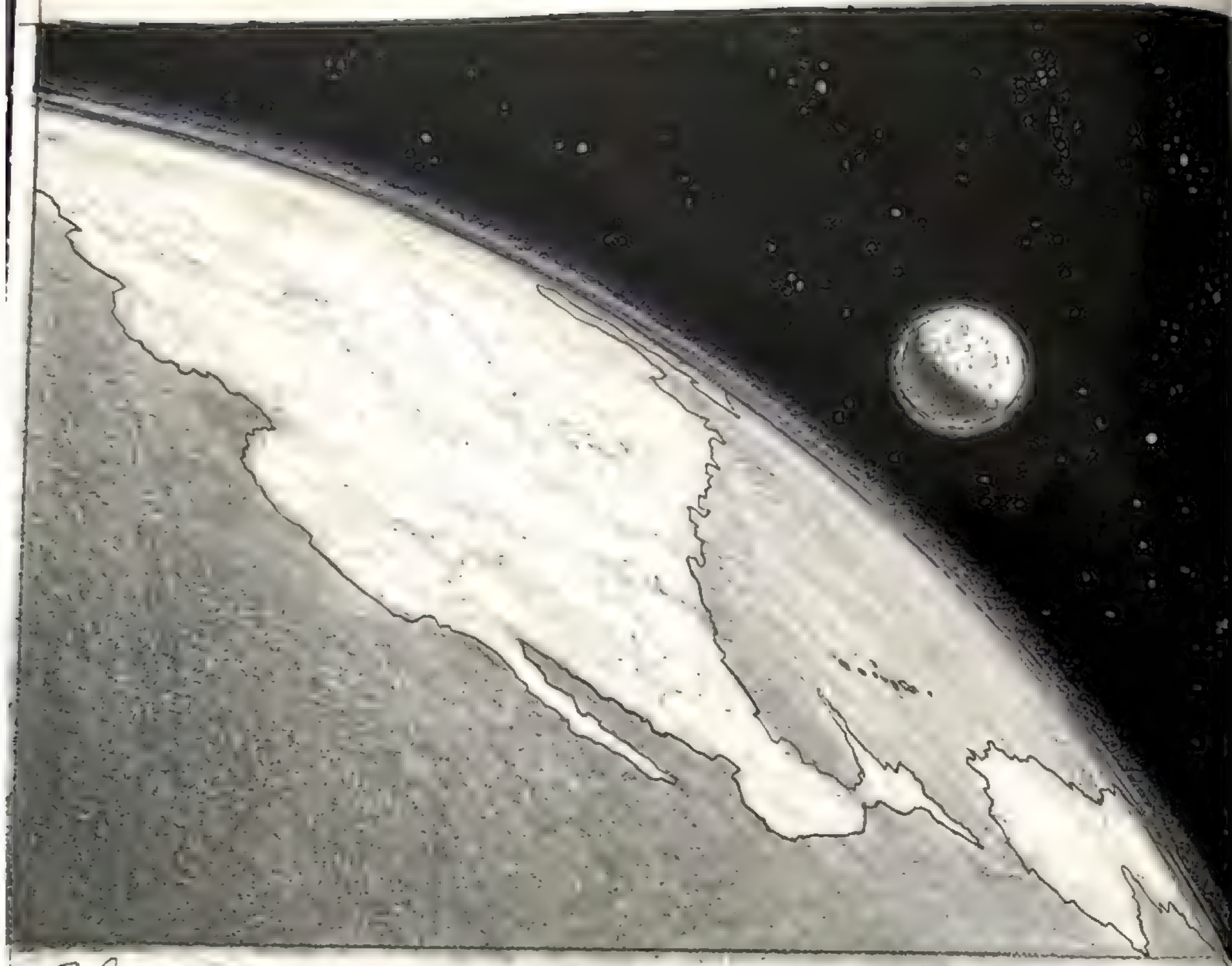
Left: Walk cycle tests from the *Invader Zim* pilot episode



It felt like an incredible secret, a tether that was grounding me, a source of power. No one could sway me from loving this show, or from loving cartoons. If they couldn't see what I saw in it, they were all wrong and I was definitely right. If they missed what made it special, then that was their loss.

*Zim* became a massive part of my high school experience. I found other fans at school to gush about the show with. I followed fan artists online, and read and wrote fan fiction. I doodled the characters all over my schoolwork. I drew a comic imagining what it might be like to meet Jhonen, and how I would definitely faint. I couldn't understand that he was human. Or maybe I couldn't understand that I was human. I saw humans doing human things all around me but I felt empowered to be different, even if it meant suffering. I suppose I hadn't seen that before: a story about how being different meant being punished constantly.



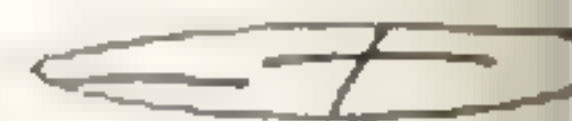


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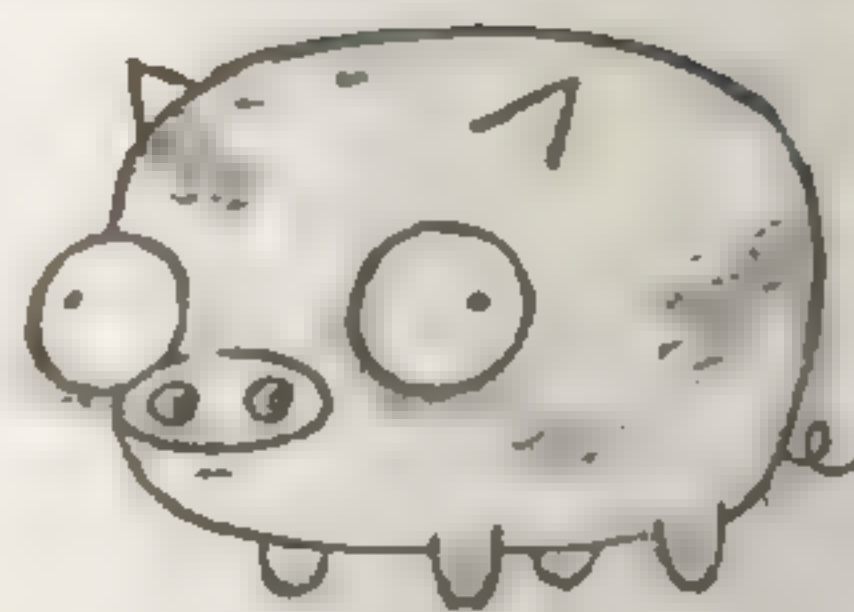


Ext Earth  
ZIM

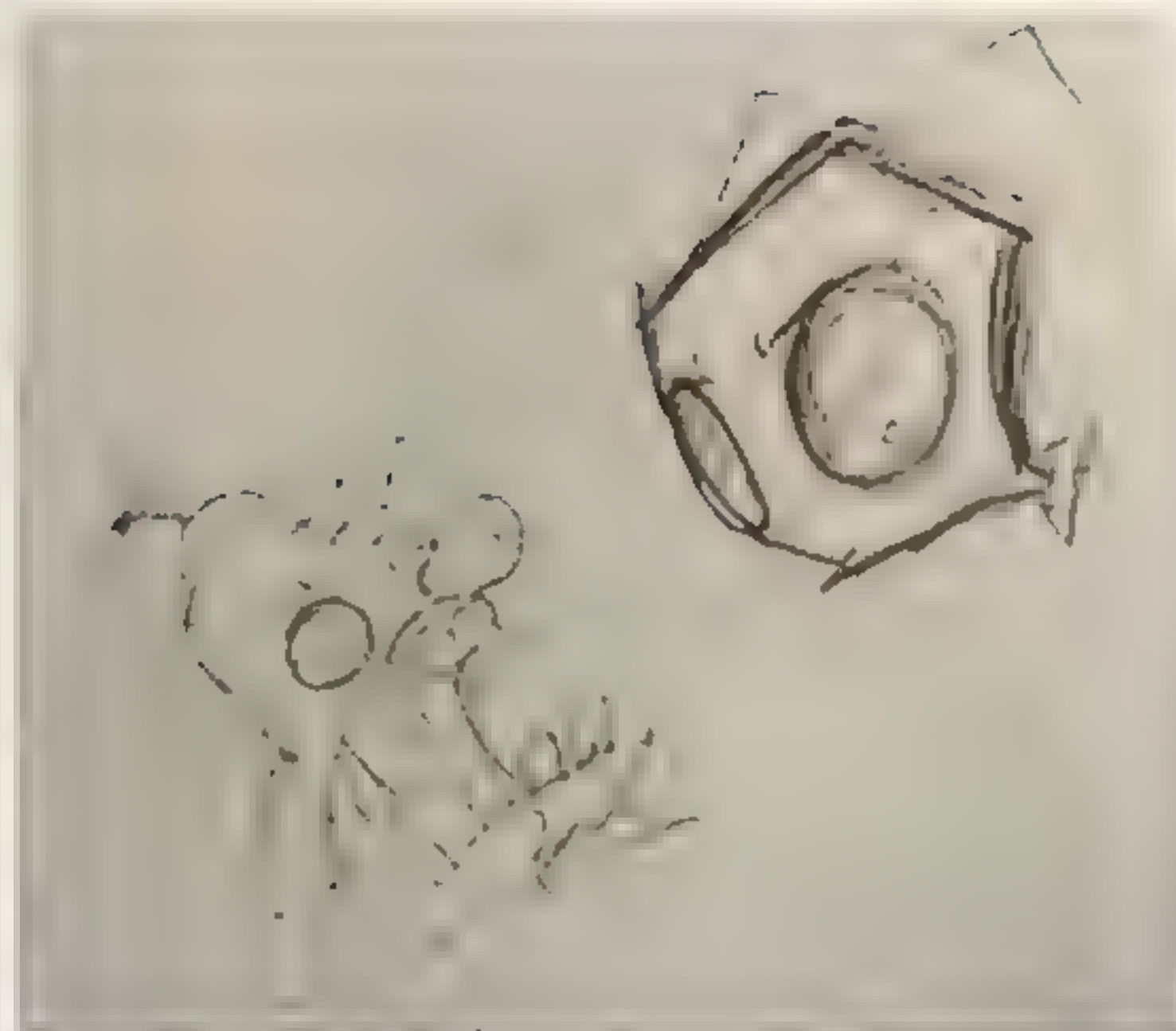
104A Germes







Filly  
Little  
Pig



Opposite: Layout drawing from the episode "Germs" (EP4A). Artwork by Spencer G. Davis

Above: Concept art by Jhonen Vasquez

It felt true, unlike the feel-good pap about how great it is to be unique. *Zim* made me feel like I could cut through that noise. *Zim* made me ambitious, *Zim* made me friends, and *Zim* gave me some sort of ground to stand on in my own mind. *Zim* gave me permission to be angry at the kids who made fun of me. *Zim* let me laugh about how miserable I was!

I feel that *Intruder Zim* will be forever woven into the fabric of my life. I can't separate it from my most formative experiences, even the painful ones. (Especially the painful ones.) But it is because of this that I understand the immense power of an animated TV show, especially when it's encapsulating a distinct and deeply personal point of view. As much as I burn with embarrassment to write about all this, my parasocial relationship with Jhonen gave me such strength and direction that I honestly don't know who I would have been without it. Since getting to know Jhonen, and

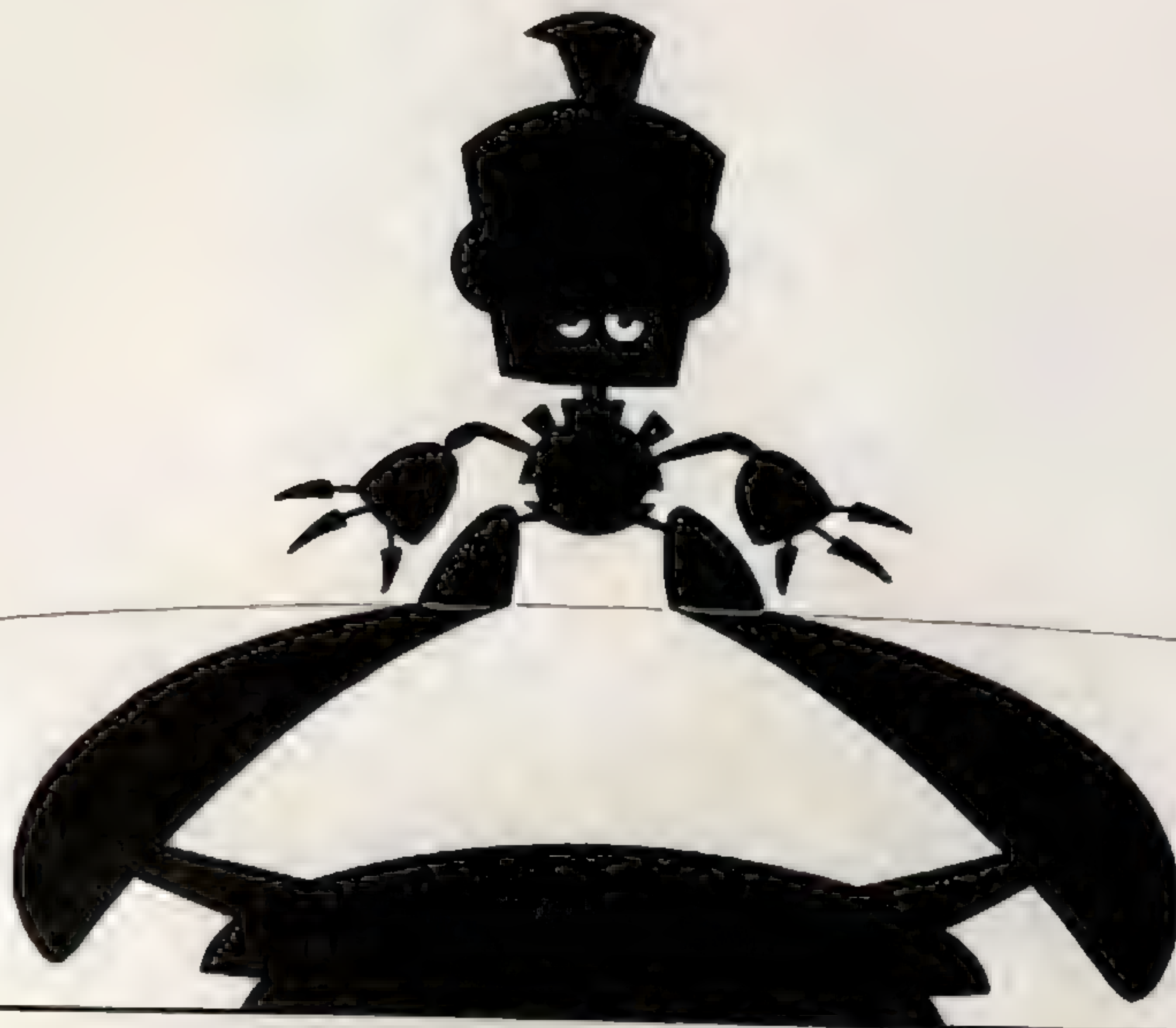
myself, a whole lot better, I can say with certainty that we are both humans . . . and I find myself looking cautiously but fondly at obsession and embarrassment as deeply human things to feel, even when they're evoked by a cartoon. (Especially when they're evoked by a cartoon.)

I wonder as you pick up this book what your relationship is to this show and these characters and this art. I wish I could know what this show meant to you, when you discovered it, and why it resonated with you. In addition to what this show meant to you personally, I hope you can also love these drawings as lines on paper, and love these artists as human beings.

—RS

**Rebecca Sugar** is a *New York Times* bestselling author and the creator of the Emmy-nominated show *Steven Universe* on Cartoon Network. She previously worked as a writer and storyboard artist on Cartoon Network's animated series *Adventure Time*. She's an artist, songwriter, and director.





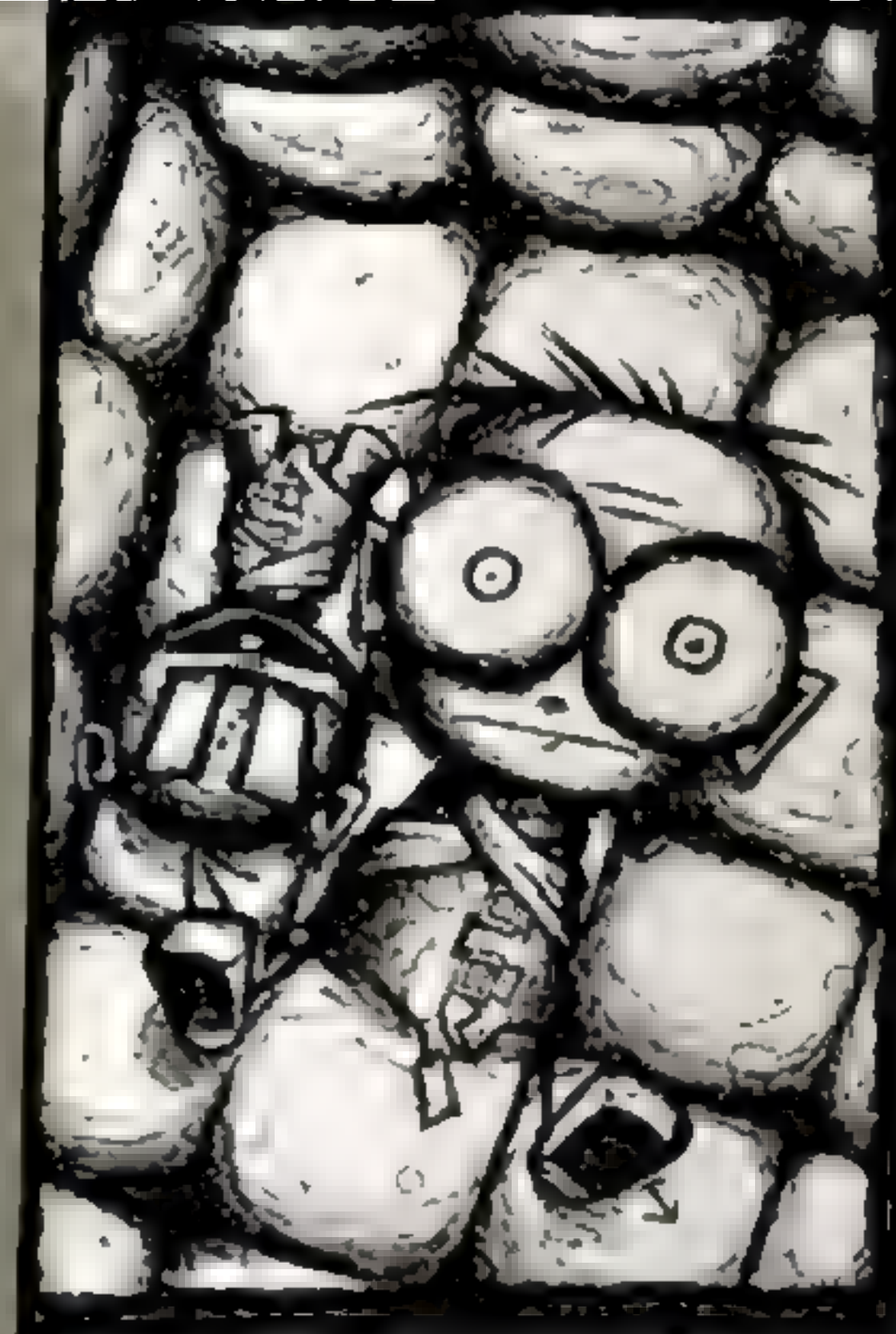
PILOT

"INVADER ZIM"

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# 1: SMALL PRESS, BIG STUDIO

## THE HISTORY OF ZIM

### Cosmic Beginnings

In a hostile galaxy, Earth had grown soft. Once a savage planet ruled by gigantic, terrible dinosaurs, time passed, and it became populated with patchy-haired primates. These simple Earthlings spent their time milling about malls, consuming weenies, and idolizing breakfast-cereal mascots. Earth lay exposed: an easy target for intergalactic invasion.

Deep in space, the Irken Empire was commencing Operation Impending Doom 2. The Irkens' goal was total, universal conquest. The most elite Irken invaders were called to gather on the convention planet Conventia. Each invader was assigned a robot sidekick, a ship, and their own planet to infiltrate. Invaders were to blend in with the native inhabitants, gather intelligence, assess weaknesses, and prepare for the Irken Armada's approaching conquest.

The event was orchestrated by the Almighty Tallest, the two supreme Irken leaders whose sole claim to

authority was their tall stature. The first Irken invader called to the convention stage surprised the Tallest: He had grown. Impressed, the Tallest assigned this invader to the planet with the universe's most comfortable couch. Things were running smoothly.

Surprising all in attendance, a remarkably small invader burst into the orderly event. It was Invader Zim. Previously an operative for Operation Impending Doom 1, he had inadvertently sabotaged that mission by starting the destruction even before leaving his home planet, Irk. As a result, Zim had been banished to work food service on the planet Foodecourtia.

Now, having crashed the ceremony, Zim stood front and center, awaiting confidently his next assignment, as if he weren't the sole cause of the previous disaster. Hatching a plan, the snickering Almighty Tallest assigned Zim to that mysterious, faraway planet,

Opposite: A layout drawing from the pilot episode of *Invader Zim*.

Above: Squee, one of Jhonen's pre-Zim characters first introduced in the comics series *Johnny*

*the Homicidal Maniac*, is pictured here spending some time in the rubber room.





Earth—so mysterious that Earth wasn't even on the Irken map. Compounding their nefariousness, the Tallest issued Zim a sidekick robot harvested from the trash, with a brain made of pocket lint and refuse. Zim and his malfunctioning robot Gir enthusiastically set off for Earth. Zim knew that he was the best Irken for the job. He only had to prove it. Cleverly disguising himself as a normal green boy (and Gir as a normal green dog), Zim began his life as an Earthling. By day, Zim attended Skool with the other human youngsters, and by night, Zim churned with manic paranoia in his secret underground base, plotting against perceived threats and concocting diabolical countermeasures. Gir spent his time enjoying tacos and befriending a pig, among other things.

In Zim's head, the Almighty Tallest would be pleased. This was the only thing that his little invader's heart desired.

Zim, as it turned out, was not the invader who would conquer the Earth. Zim was the invader that the big, dumb Earth deserved.

### Comics Beginnings

Elsewhere on Earth, around the Earth-year 1990, Jhonen Vasquez was attending East San Jose's Mt. Pleasant High School, where he could often be found sitting in the corner of some classroom or huddled in the cafeteria writing and drawing. Jhonen drew a world of black-and-white characters in the margins of assignment papers and in his sketchbooks in his developing angular style—characters whose angst and fears were pushed to wild extremes.

**Jhonen Vasquez (series creator):** My high school experience was pretty typical; I had friends—I wasn't a complete loner—but I did



spend a lot of time with my little notebooks writing down stories. I was stuck up in my own head, just drawing and keeping to myself, judging everyone around me. [laughs]

One of Jhonen's significant characters first appeared in a comic strip that was published in his high school paper: *Johnny the Little Homicidal Maniac*. This childlike Johnny would gleefully commit murders for laughs in the short setup-and-punchline format of newspaper comic strips. Johnny's victims were cartoon avatars of Jhonen's ire.

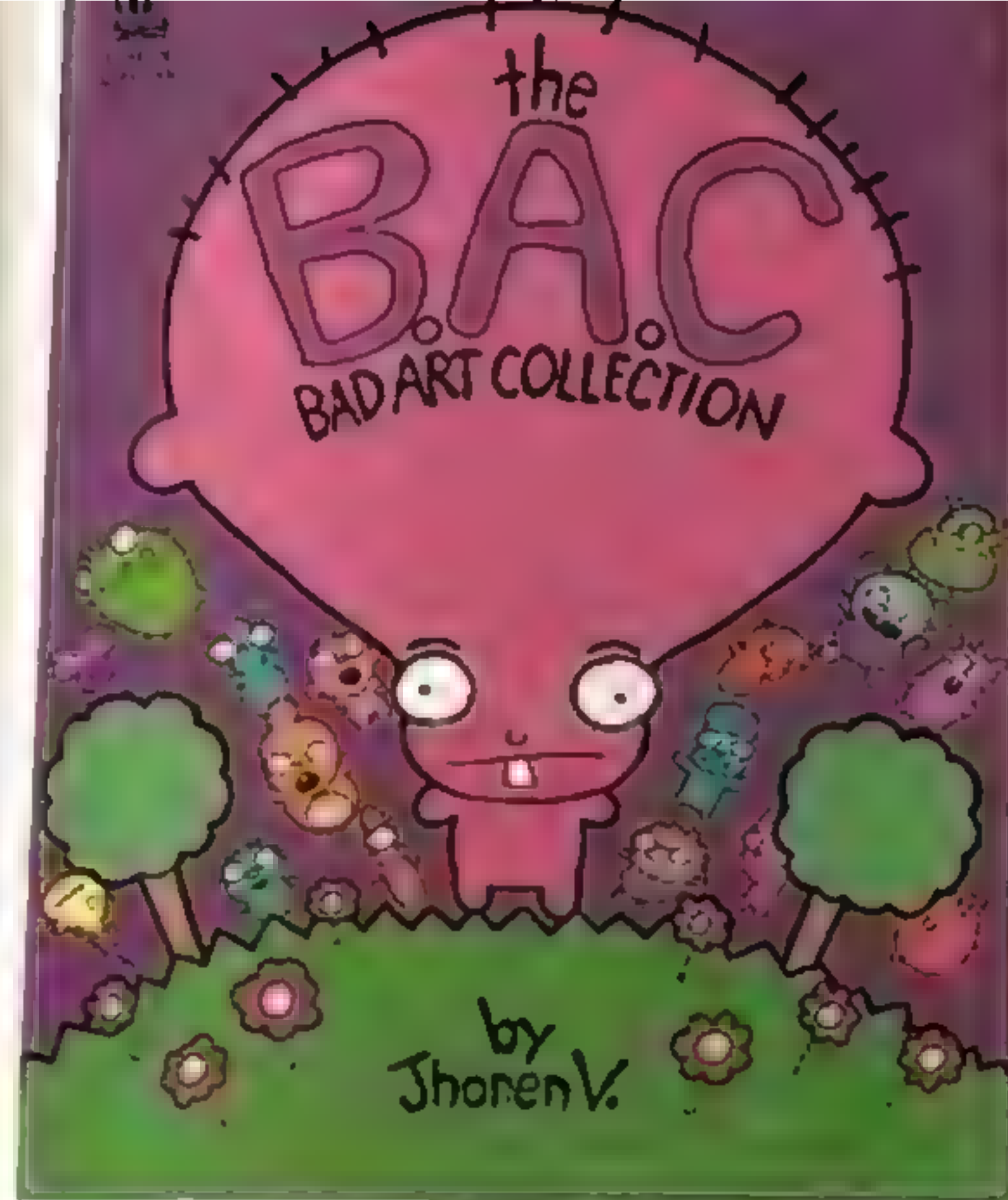
**Jhonen:** I'm pretty sure that I created *Johnny* specifically for the school paper, which sounds insane now. A handful of people thought it was really funny, a majority of people didn't care, and there were probably a few teachers who thought

This page: *Johnny the Little Homicidal Maniac* made his debut in Jhonen's high school newspaper comics section with a "Hi, I'm Johnny."

The murdering commenced in the third panel. Filler Bunny comics were sometimes made by Jhonen during all-night sessions to capitalize on

the exhaustion and insanity that set in after hours of constant cartooning.





It was not in the best taste. I didn't care. I was just having so much fun making up stuff. I loved that it was being seen. Up until then I had been doing things just for myself and only showing a few friends. Johnny was me having my say in my own particular way.

After Jhonen graduated in 1992, the character's design evolved into an older and taller maniac, and the comic strip format evolved with him into multipage comics. Little Johnny had simply become Johnny, or NNY for short.

Jhonen's fluency in the visual language of comics was developing along with his broadening influences. Independent and small press comics provided inspiration with a breadth of styles and approaches. Do-it-yourself zines and self-published comics provided examples of total artistic freedom and raw expression.

**Jhonen:** Right at the end and out of high school, I was dating a girl who had a big indie comics collection and she introduced me to a lot of cool stuff. She loved that I was doing comics. In addition to *Johnny*, I was also making all those *Bad Art Collection* comics. I would send her a couple of pages at a time, and she would keep asking for more and more, so I came up with the crappiest, quickest comic I could do and that was *Happy Noodle Boy*.

Next, Jhonen's lifelong fascination with movies led him to study film production. Jhonen attended film school in Cupertino, California, while continuing to create comics. Not long into his studies, Jhonen made the decision to drop out to focus on his comics, which were consuming more of his time and energy, and were beginning to get published. Early *Johnny the*



*Homicidal Maniac* and *Happy Noodle Boy* pages were printed in *Carpe Noctem Magazine*, the self-described "dark art journal." To supplement his comics income, Jhonen worked shifts selling DVDs and disc players at a local retailer, Laverland. Jhonen's efforts began to pay off when *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac*, starring the rail-thin serial killer, was published as a seven-issue limited series in 1995–97 by Slave Labor Graphics, an independent comics press with multiple books that feature dark and off-kilter humor. *Johnny* was Jhonen's first substantial success as a comics creator, and was likewise a hit for Slave Labor.

Comics were blossoming during this fertile period in the nineties. Slave Labor Graphics was one of a constellation of independent press outfits active outside of the "big two"—DC and Marvel—that included Fantagraphics, Drawn & Quarterly, Dark Horse Comics, and more. In addition to these publishers, small

(Continued on page 16)

**This page:** The cover of *The Bad Art Collection*, which was a collection of mostly one-page absurd and humorous comics with titles

like "When the Peanuts Wept," "Throbbing Evil Wedgies of Nocturnal Squeaky Cheese," "Victims of Detective Faytas," and "Fondling the Intestinal

Meat Inhibitors." Jhonen's other comics like *Happy Noodle Boy* and *Felix Bunny* shared an ethos of immediacy and improvisation. Above right, *Johnny the*

*Homicidal Maniac* had matured into a comic book format and the character himself grew older and became more nuanced.





HEY, LISTEN! LISTEN TO ME, YOU HAVE TO TALK TO ME. TELL ME WHY YOU'RE DOING THIS. MY FRIEND MY FRIEND NEEDS HELP.

COMICS



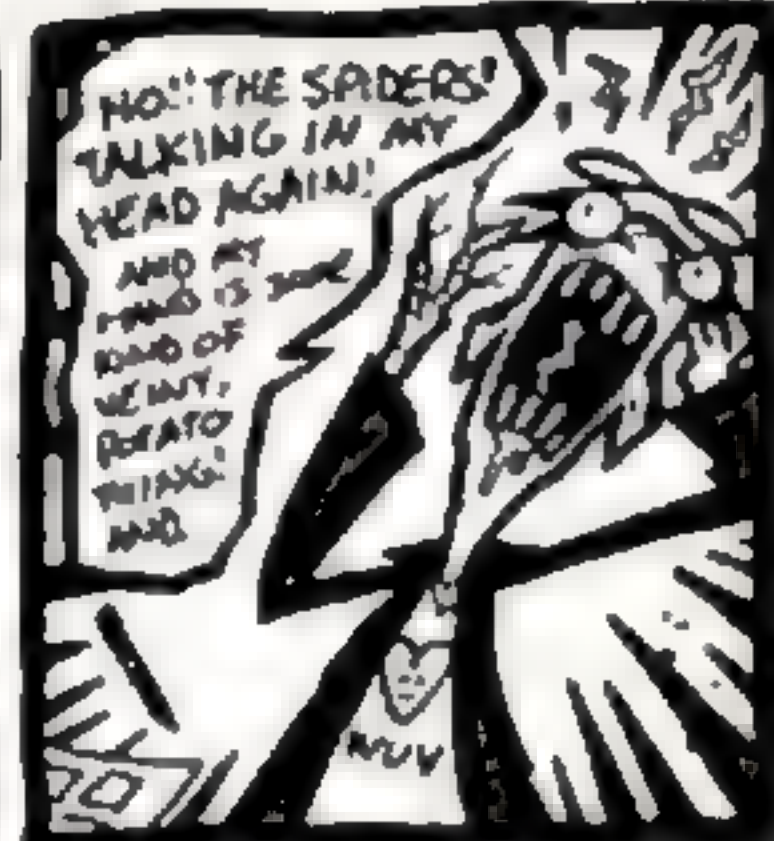
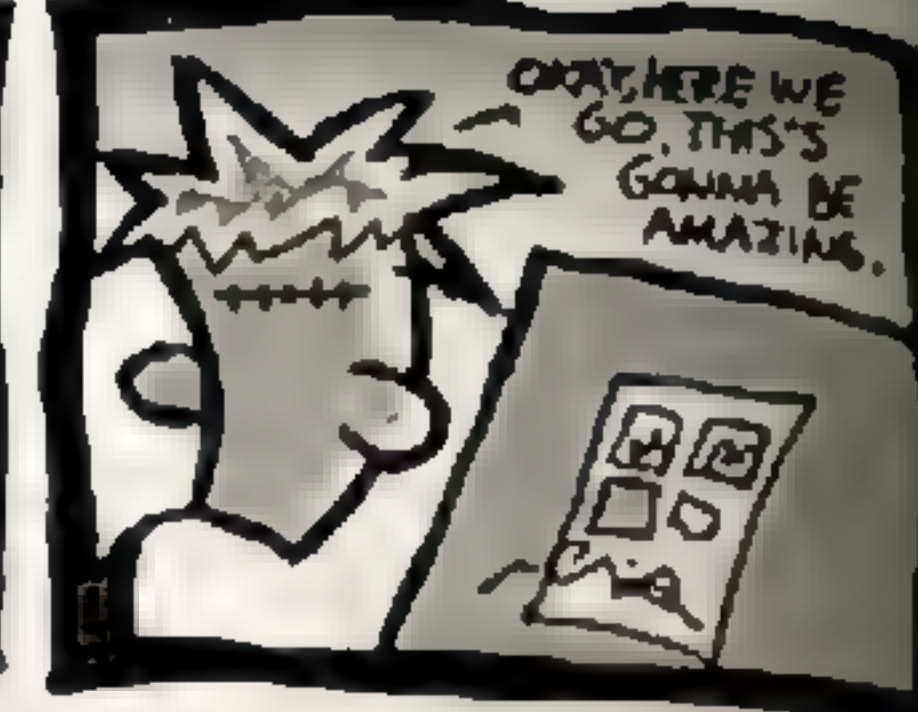




This spread: Two of Ihonen's primary cartoon series were Johnny the Homicidal Maniac and Squeel, which was a spinoff from Johnny that

featured Johnny's neighbor, the fearful and innocent Squeel. Both were published in limited series by Slave Labor Graphics.





and many presses were producing their own catalogs of books, along with do-it-yourself zinesters, self-publishing collectives, and artists of all sorts.

An umbrella term, "alternative comics," was used to describe this range of material, which varied from glossy graphic novels to photocopied pamphlets to pristinely silk-screened, handmade books with print runs in the tens of copies. The annual gatherings for alternative comics creators and fans to congregate were small press comics conventions like Small Press Expo (SPX) in Bethesda, Maryland, and Alternative Press Expo (APE) in the San Francisco Bay Area. Jhonen was a regular guest at APE, where his comics fans would line up down the aisle for his signing appearances—a major convention-style spectacle not typically seen at these indie-centric events.

Although Jhonen was coming up in this nineties alternative comics epoch, he traces his earliest comics

inspiration to the previous decade's independent comics era. His childhood enjoyment of Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. The Turtles had gained worldwide reach through their animated cartoons, feature films, and merchandise, but it was the original eighties black-and-white comics from which they originated that hooked Jhonen.

**Jhonen:** As a kid I didn't really seek comics out. I was primarily into movies and animation, but when my brother started collecting the *Ninja Turtles* comics, it just triggered something in my brain. I was too young to recognize exactly what it was, but I knew that there was something different about them. I could detect when something felt mainstream and safe, or when it felt more like an outlier. There was something different about those books that just felt dirtier, more dangerous. The characters

never seemed healed over from their last butt es. I got the sense that there was a real person behind the work on the page like I had never felt before. It's as if the comics were less removed from the initial moment when the creators came up with an idea and were excited to get it down on the page. There was a rawness to it.

This sense that the creator was near, visible, and unique—an undiluted voice—was also evident in Jhonen's own work. *Johnny* is full of fourth-wall-breaking asides that the author makes to the audience; secret images and messages embedded through decorative panel borders; and outrageously abrupt conclusions that jolt readers back out of a story.

Jhonen's approach to making comics foreshadowed his approach to making an animated series, with an emphasis on spontaneity. In comics and animation,

This page: Four separate appearances of Jhonen himself wrestling with his craft (among

many more) from the wild and spontaneous pages of *Filler Bunny* comics.





there are many phases of production that can seem tedious, so Jhonen embraced the chaos of creation, elevating improvisation's importance in the process.

**Jhonen:** I get impatient, and I like the process to be as spontaneous as I can make it. For my comics, I generally sketch a page a day and then ink it the next. My comics are just very generally outlined, as opposed to being scripted. Up to the moment that I'm inking in the words, I don't know what the characters are going to say, but I know what they have to convey. It keeps the process interesting.

This kind of first-take immediacy was on display in Jhonen's comics such as *The Bad Art Collection* (published in 1996) and *Filler Bunny* (three issues published in 2000, 2005, and 2014), which were experiments in automatic comics creation that Jhonen would create

nonstop over twenty-four-hour periods, forgoing sleep. This ethos also later informed Jhonen's approach where ever possible during the production of *Invader Zim*.

### Question Sleep

The comics-creator lifestyle was a solitary one for Jhonen. Could he set his own hours? Sure. Maybe spiral into an ever-deepening hole of staying up later and later? Sure.

**Jhonen:** With comics, you sit alone—you can literally go without speaking to people for twenty-four hours. I would finish up a page at three in the morning and then be like, "Welp, time to go out. Where is everybody? It's just me? Okay, I'll go to Taco Bell and get some food I guess." This was me at nineteen years old. And you get kind of weird. It's easy to get really weird, and be aware of it. I mean, it's kind

of neat—you feel like this strange ghost that exists in the little times where everyone else is gone and asleep.

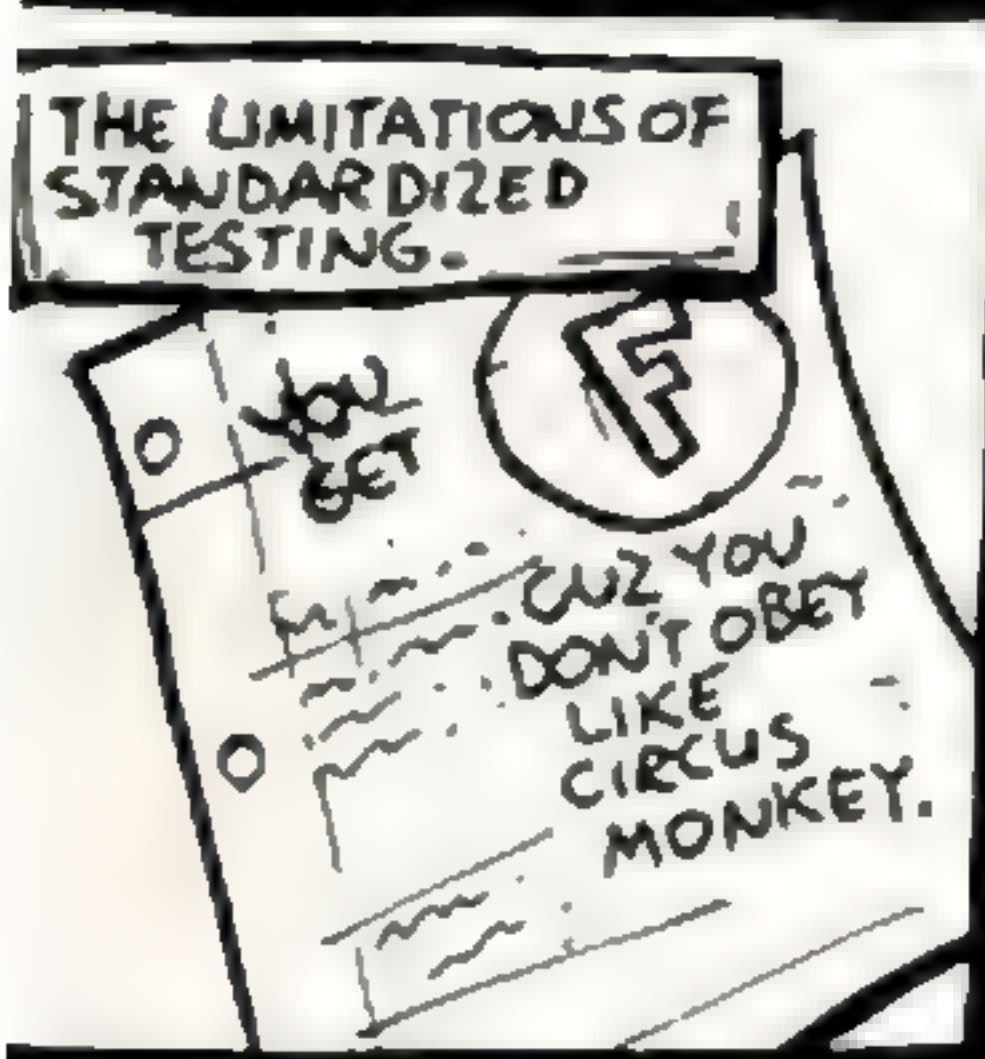
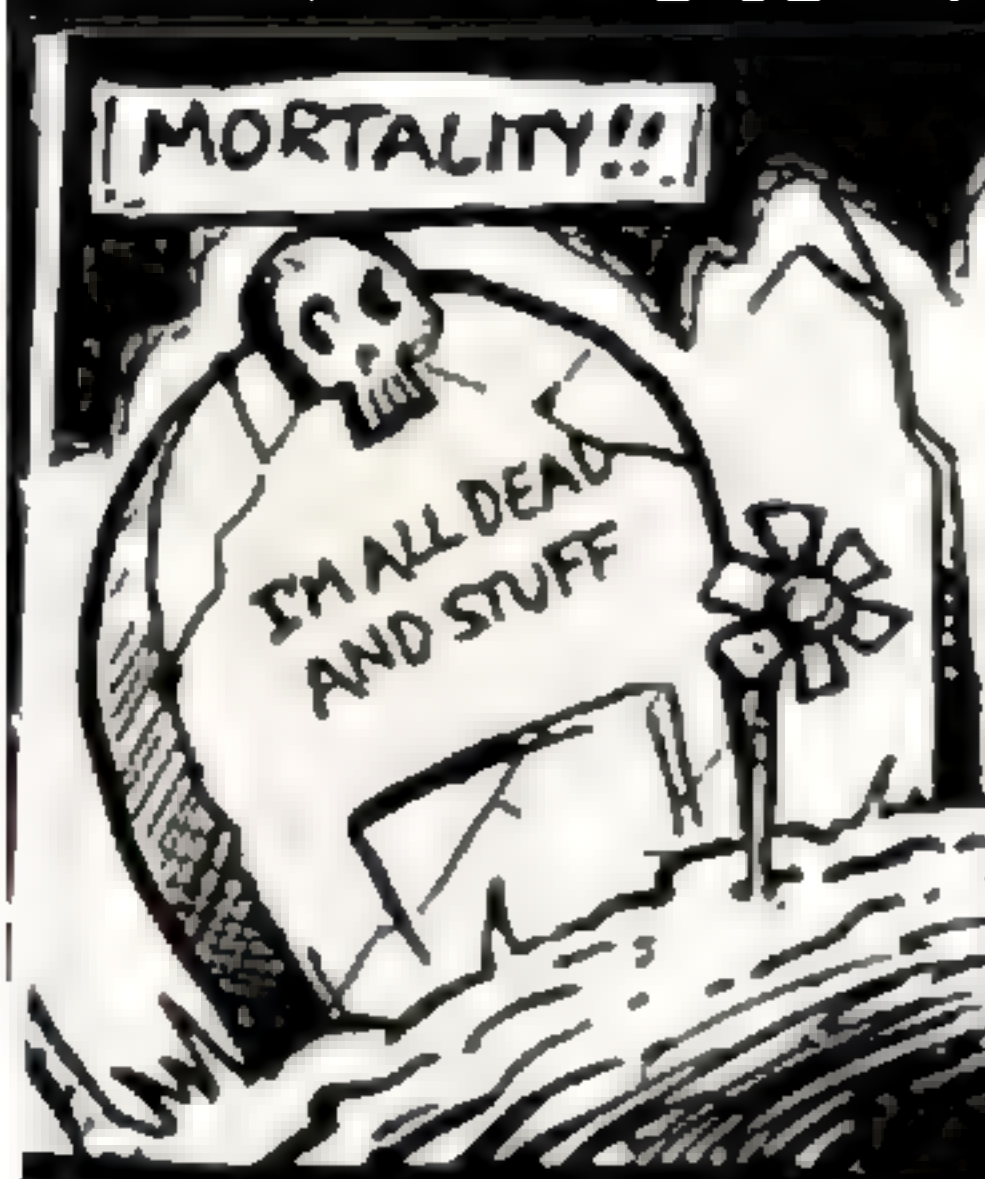
Sleep, and questioning it, is an ongoing theme in Jhonen's work. The "director's cut" cover art for the collected *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* features a big graphic "Z?" front and center, among other places.

**Jhonen:** The "Z?" motif came out of my preoccupation with just being awake, on several levels. I love consciousness, and I don't know if it's because sleep creeps me out. Lying in bed at night has always been one of the worst times in my day. As far back as I can remember, I've always been very uncomfortable with the idea of letting go of my consciousness, and that has always been a part of my work. It's not a central focus, but Zim doesn't sleep, he doesn't need it;

(Continued on page 20)

**This page:** Squee suffers through another nightmare, and Johnny the Homicidal Maniac sports a question sleep graphic shirt.









Little  
Green  
Guy

Opposite: Aliens appeared in many of Jhonon's many comics work, such as the Zim-like invader in the top row of panels opposite, from *Squeez!*

This page: One of Jhonon's earliest drawings of the little green guy, Zim.





Johnny hates sleep, he's terrified of it. He hates the idea of letting go of his grasp of reality, and every time he wakes up he has to readjust and make sure that the dreams weren't real. The "Z?" logo was an idea to give insomnia or the dread and disdain of unconsciousness a logo like a superhero would have. It's not exactly a superpower!

### Comics Life

By 1996, six issues of *Johnny* had been published, and Jhonen was able to quit his Laserland day job and focus on comics full time. For any personal artistic-pursuit-turned-career—especially in comics, which is a difficult field to carve out a living in—this was a major accomplishment. It also meant that Jhonen's work was getting noticed, and new opportunities started to present themselves.

In the late nineties, MTV Animation was in its prime. The network was producing a slate of shows that were

targeted to an audience of teenagers and young adults. *Liquid Television*, *Aeon Flux*, *Beavis and Butt-Head*, *Daria*, and *Celebrity Deathmatch* were some of the longer-running animated series of that period. It was easy to imagine Jhonen fitting in among these surreal, gross-out, satirical, and comedic creations. MTV even had produced a precedent animated series based on an individual's comics work: *The Maxx* by Sam Kieth.

**Jhonen:** I was approached to do animation stuff by MTV when I was working on *Johnny*. But I was sort of into my comics life. I was like, "I'm busy. I'm working on comics." [laughs]

After rebuffing cable's courtship, Jhonen's *Johnny* spun off two more limited comics series, *Squee!* and *I Feel Sick*, in 1997 and 1999, respectively. *Squee!* was about the neglected child who lived next door to Johnny.

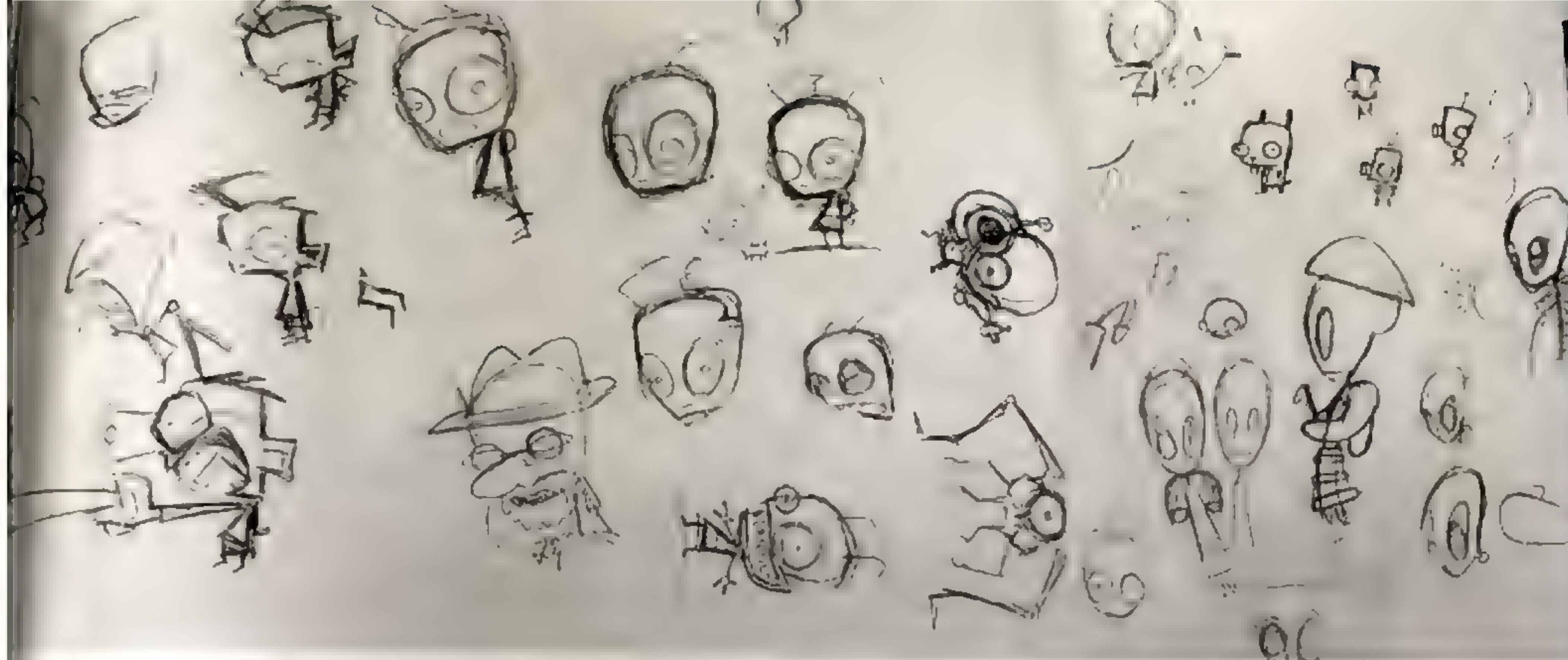
*Squee!* portrayed dark themes and horror, like *Johnny*, but as experienced through the tiny, wide-eyed perspective. There was a scary, cute, funny, gory in *Squee!* that resonated with fans—though any mess was not enough to render the comics class child-friendly. Consider Jhonen's comics work, as a harder, bloodier, relative to the scary-cute Tim Burton/Henry Selick's stop-motion animation films, or Charles Addams's and Edward Gorey's humorous cartoon illustrations. It is a popular that Jhonen's work helped to carve.

*Johnny* was largely an angry comic, while *Squee!* was marinated in fear.

**Jhonen:** *Johnny* was a bit of both adolescent anger mixed with burgeoning adult fear of the stupid one's own behavior might be. It was making fun of who I could turn into if I did

This spread: A variety of Jhonen's early development work sketching out ideas for *Invader Zim* characters.





sense of humor and self-awareness of how stupid you sound when you're still a kid but are trying to sound like some kind of godly Hannibal Lecter. *Squee!* was just pure fear—fear of dogs, aliens, toilet tragedies, etc.

As Jhonen continued publishing so many original comics stories designed with appealing characters and a strong directorial perspective, it didn't take long for the word of cartoon production to come calling again.

### Nick Nick Nick Nick na Nick Nick Niiiiiick

Throughout the 1990s on television, cable network Nickelodeon (a Viacom-owned corporate sibling of MTV) had found success by hiring creators with bold points of view and unusual visual voices. These creators would produce shows that were fresh alternatives to

the previous decade, which had been largely dominated by toyetic Saturday morning cartoons on the broadcast networks. *Doug* (premiering in 1991), *Rocko's Modern Life* (1993), *Hey Arnold!* (1996), and a truckload of other shows produced by studio Klasky Csupo—such as *Rugrats* (1991) and *Aaahh!!! Real Monsters* (1994)—were some of Nick's offerings.

Also premiering in 1991, *Ren and Stimpy* pushed Nickelodeon's broadcast to new, weird extremes, with its body-horror close-ups of festering tooth sockets, cartoonish but extra-dramatic psychological abuse and physical violence, and adult innuendo in the tradition of Warner Bros., Fleischer Studios, MGM, Lantz, and Terrytoons theatrical shorts, which all did much of the same in the first half of the twentieth century. Besides the gleeful grossness of nose goblins, pet farts, and cat barf, *Ren and Stimpy* also showcased virtuoso cartooning and design, and was the instigator of a mini-revolution

in TV animation production methods. After *Ren and Stimpy's* success, many other series adopted its cartoonist- and storyboard-driven approach, which itself was revived from the methods used for mid-twentieth-century theatrical shorts. Many series also copied its stylish visual elements.

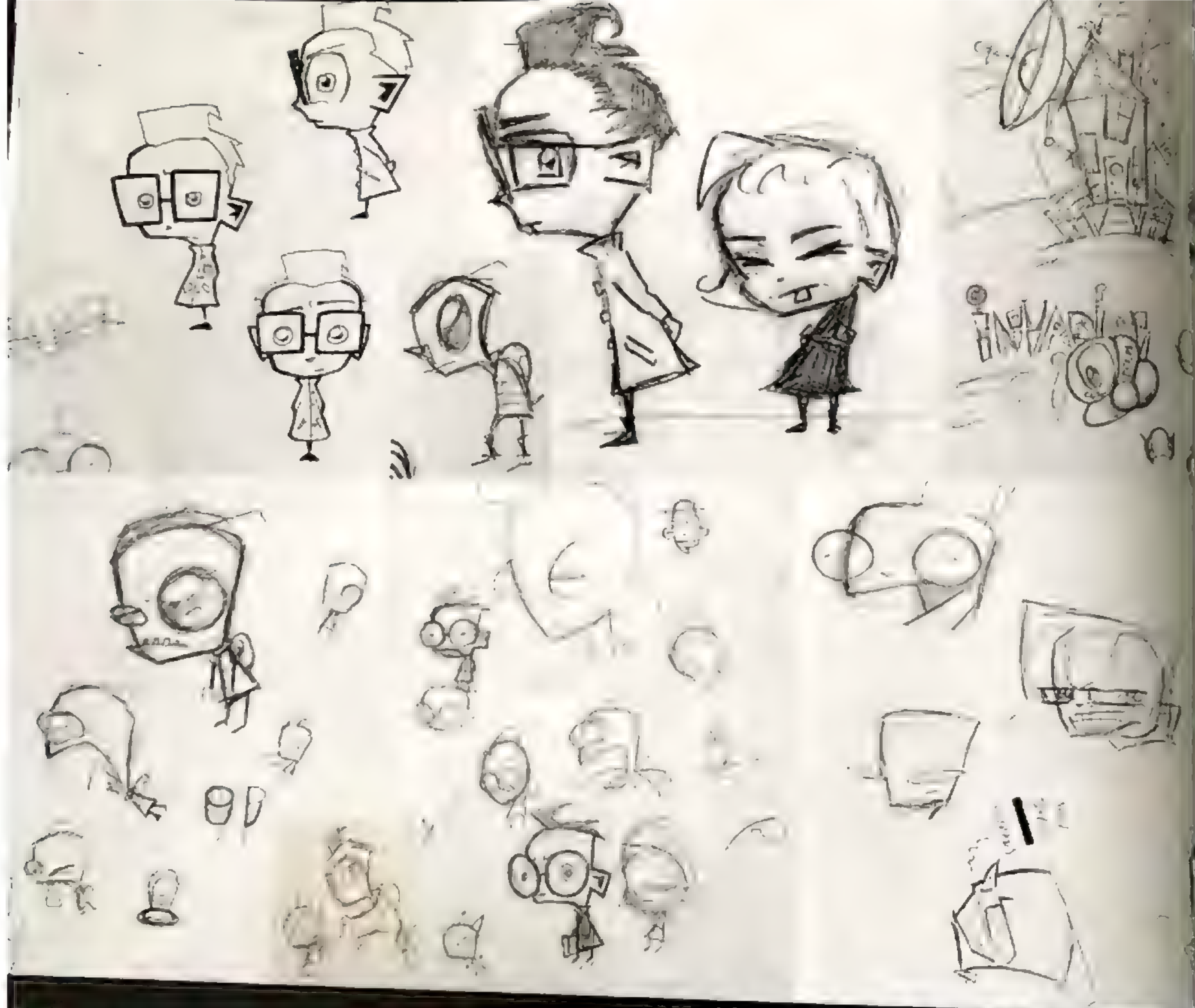
To produce this kind of innovative work, television producers always have their feelers out, searching for potential creative hit makers to partner with. One executive producer, Mary Harrington, worked on several of Nickelodeon's boldest, and perhaps riskiest—but successful—series: *Rocko's Modern Life* and *Ren and Stimpy*. Mary's feelers were not shy of wild material.

**Mary Harrington [executive producer]:** I saw *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* and was blown away by Jhonen's art style, his character design. What I also noticed was that it felt very cinematic to me.

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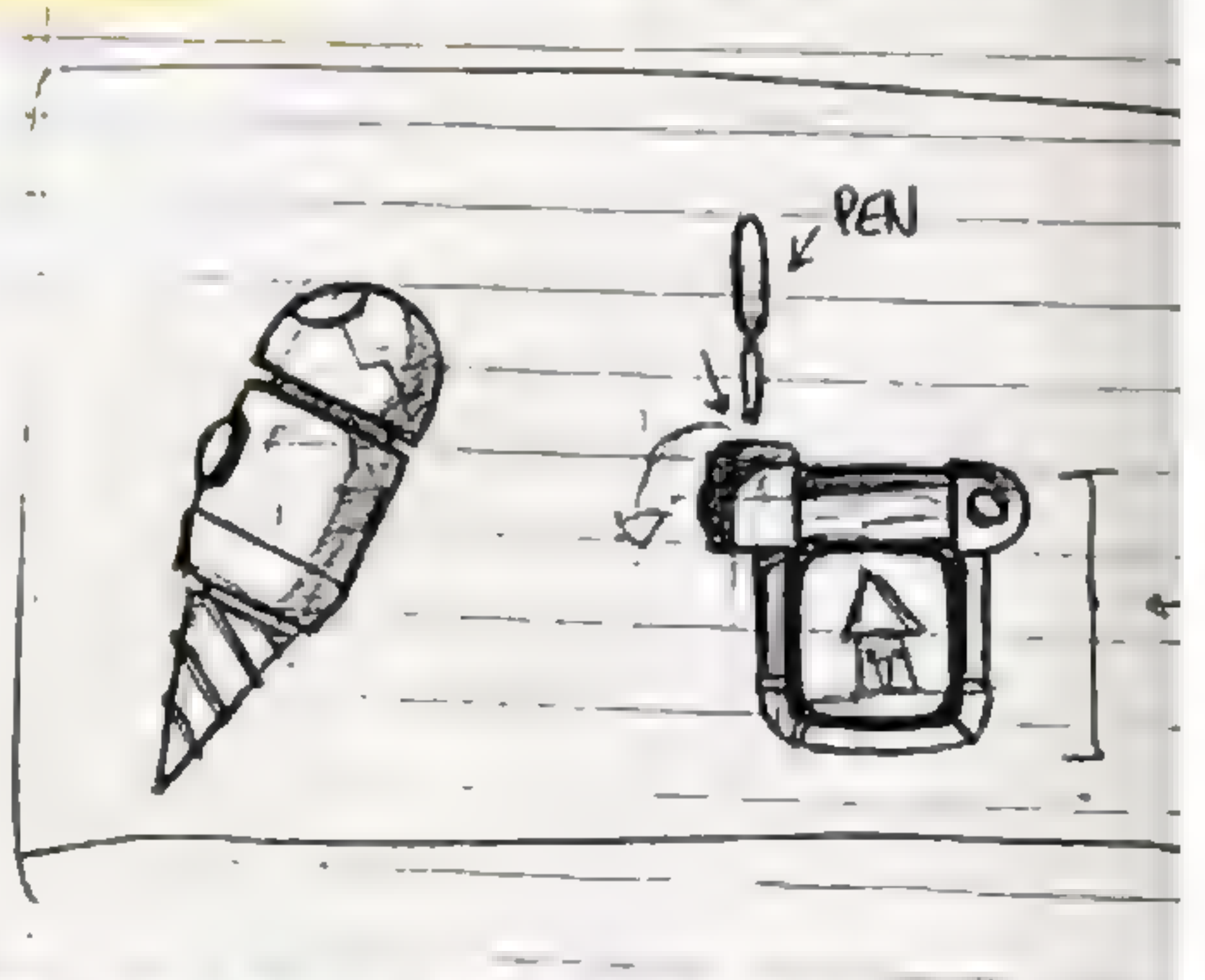
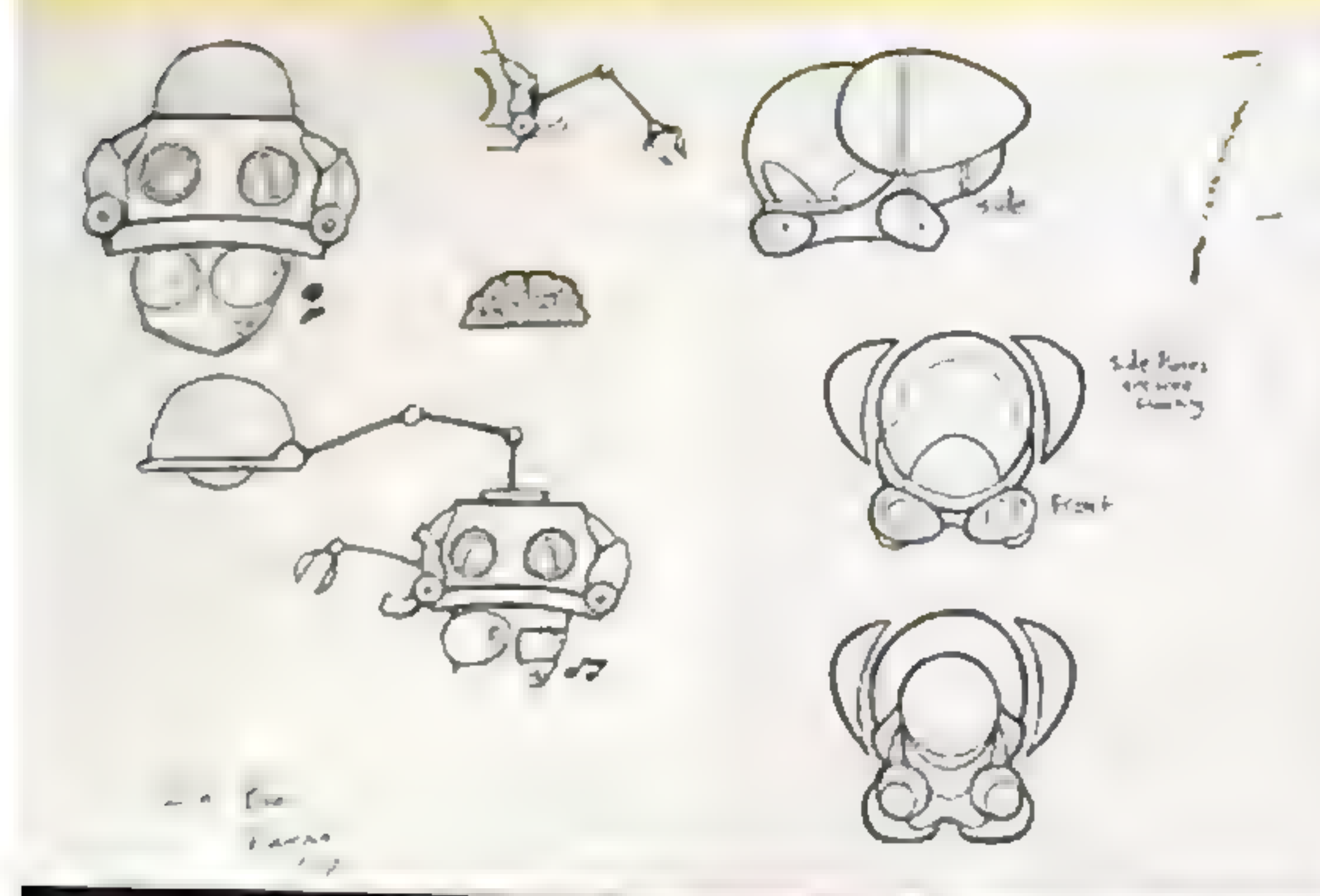
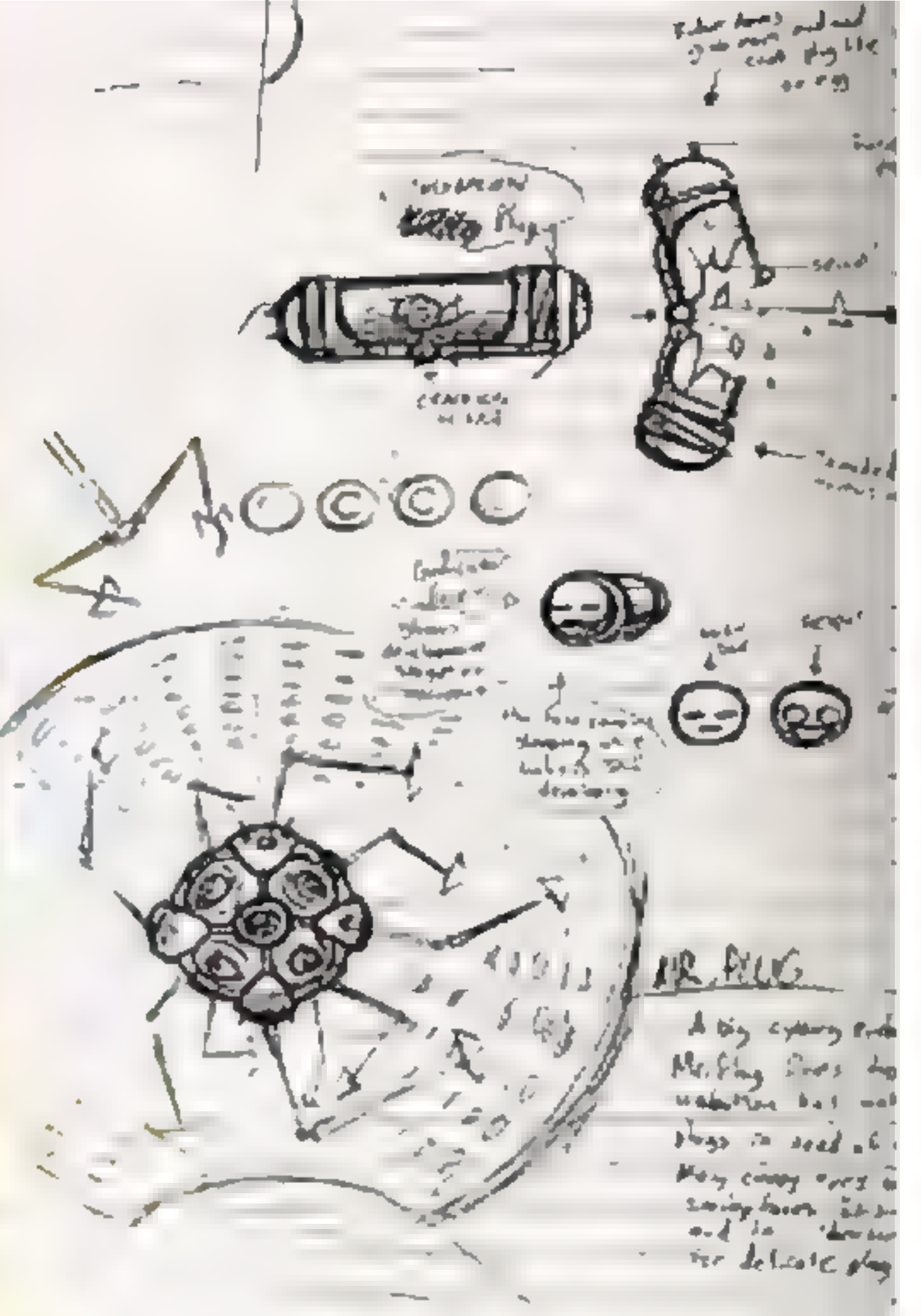
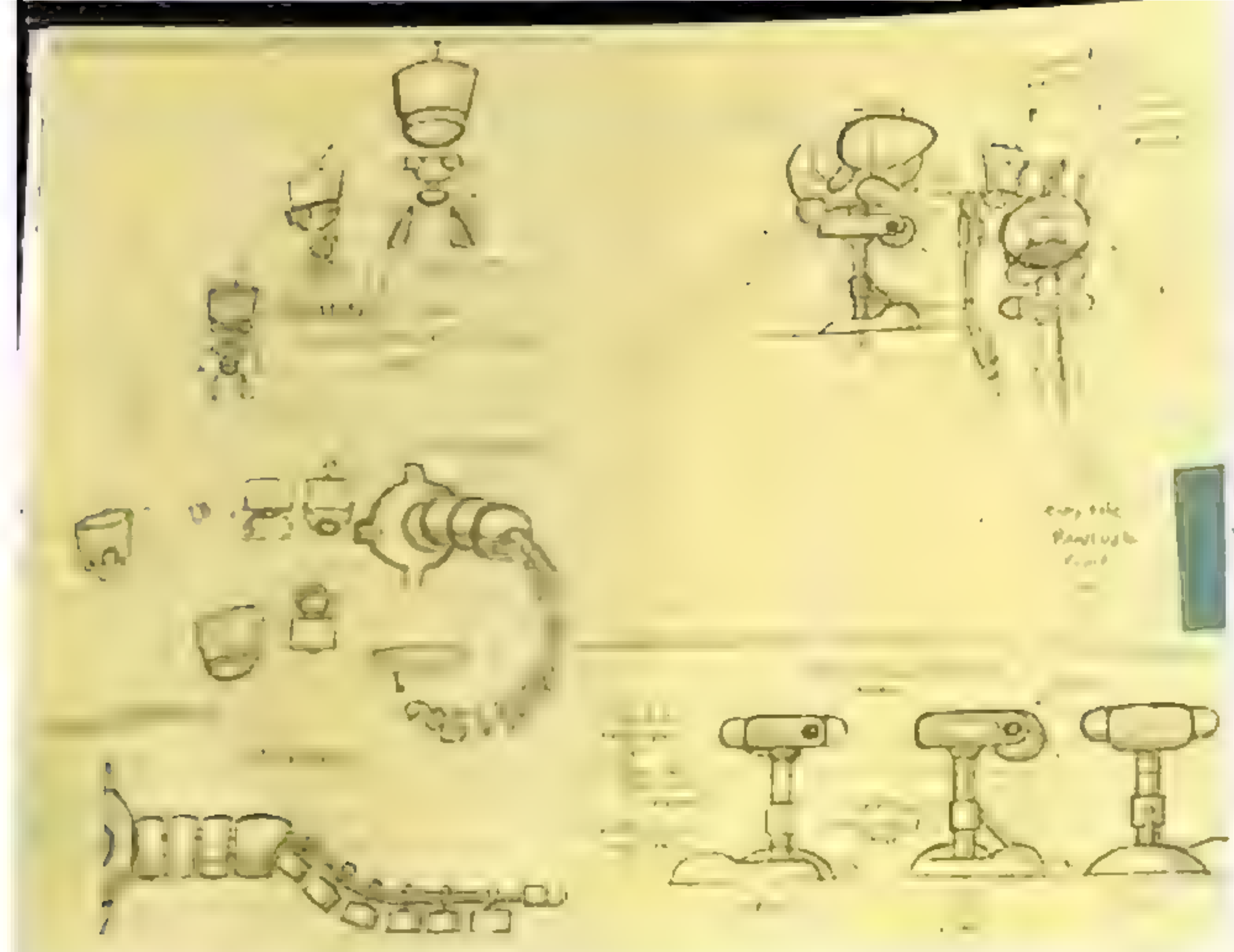




This spread: More early concept sketch work by Jensen as each of the main characters began to form their more familiar shapes. Many of these

drawings are the pencils for artwork that was used in the show bible, which is a document that details the characters, world, and potential stories.









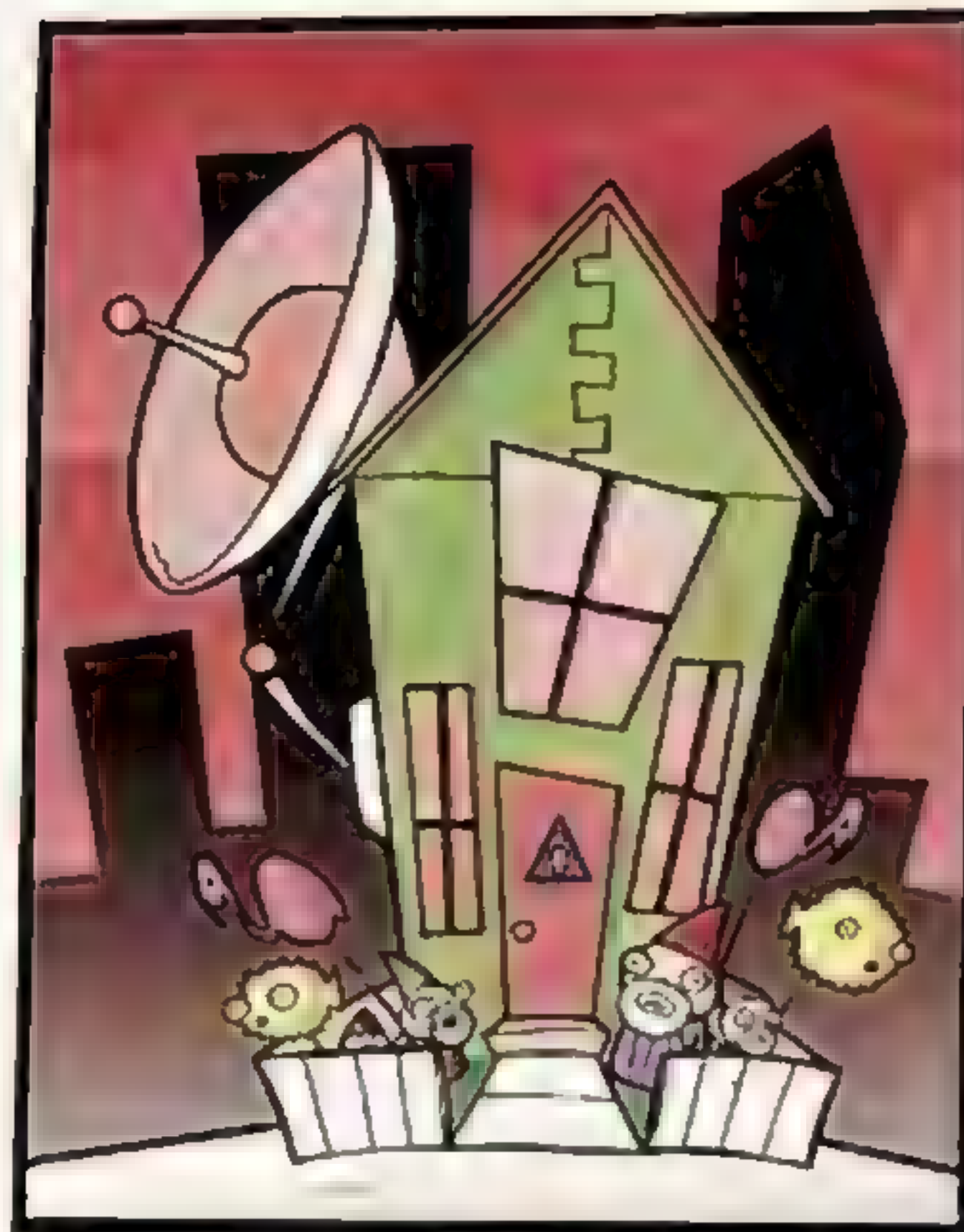




Jhonen felt like someone who was going to become a director. I could see it in the way that he composed the shots in his comic book.

Jhonen was intentional with each comics panel, moving the point of view around as if he held a camera on the action, creating a rhythm of shots with the drawings. Wide shots, extreme close-ups, up and down angles, forced perspective and lens distortion can be found all on one page of *Johnny*. Placed in the dense overall layout of each page with black borders and gutters as opposed to the typical white space between panels, the panels appear to be mini screens glowing from the darkness that one might imagine coming to life in sequence as the eye follows along.

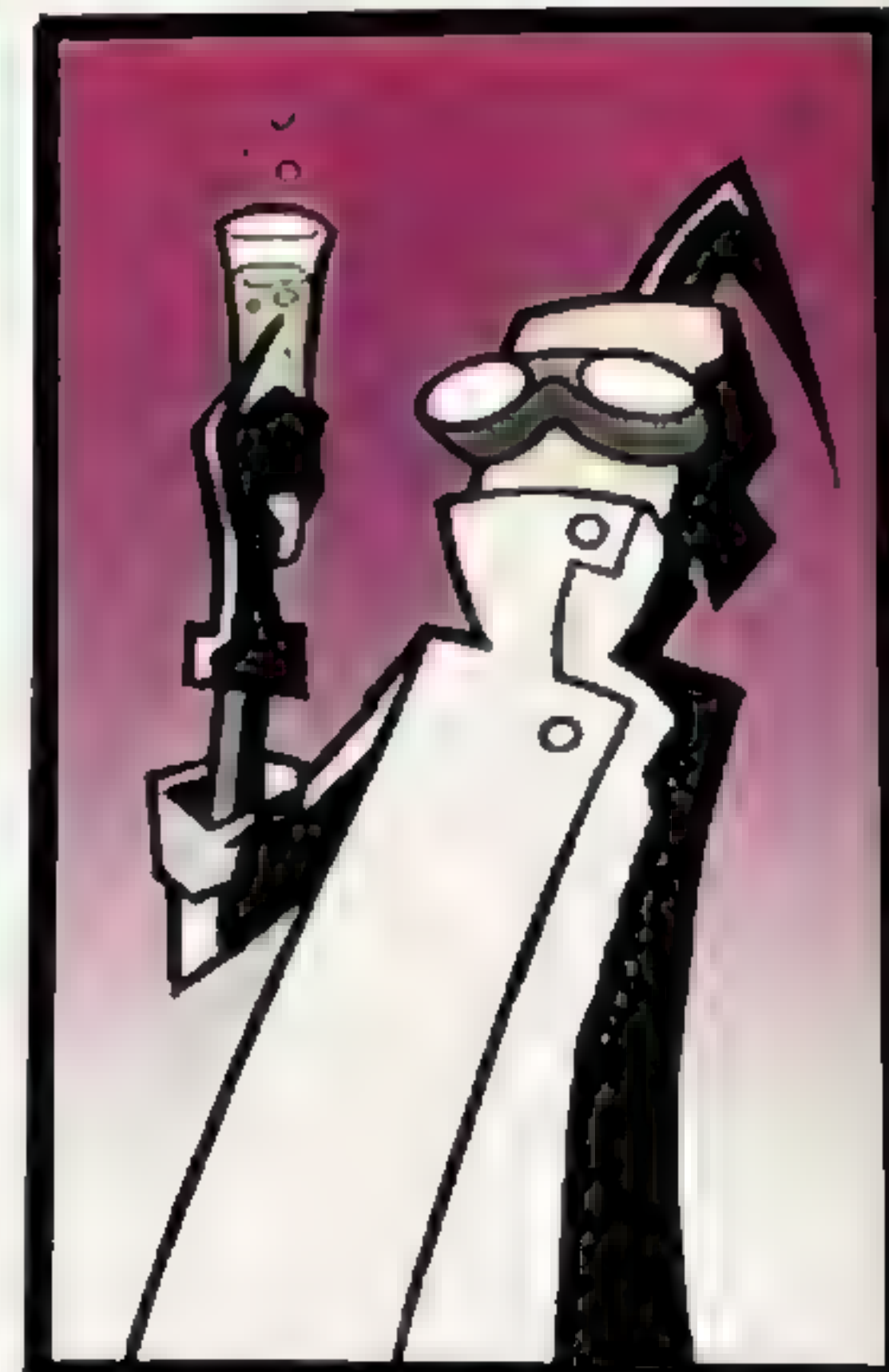
**Mary:** But what really intrigued me was the way he developed the characters. There was a tone and a



humor that I felt could definitely translate to kids and keep the adult audience. For instance, Johnny, who's a homicidal maniac, had this wonderful relationship with Squeel! And because of this relationship, you'd have empathy with Johnny. I was fascinated that I had empathy for this horrible character. Jhonen really understands characters very well. And he's funny, too. I had to track him down.

Mary found Jhonen via cartoonist and Slave Labor publisher Dan Vado, and she sat down to talk with Jhonen in San Jose.

**Mary:** By the time I met with Jhonen, I had several successful projects behind me. One of the key points that I stressed was that I really felt that I understood his creative voice, and that by working with me, and by doing a project with Nickelodeon,



we wouldn't ruin his brand. That I got it. And that it would still be cool. We would not lose that. I had worked on projects where the creative and creator had a very strong tone, and we were successful in translating that to a television show.

**Jhonen:** I didn't think it was weird that I was approached by Nickelodeon at all. Every time people talk about me working on the series back in the day or even now, it's become a joke—about how crazy it was to ask me to do a kids' show. But to me it's not weird for me to think up a kids' show, or a show of any type. I love everything. I mean, I got it. People are used to seeing my stuff and describing as "adult." I was in my teens when I was working on *Johnny* and my comics and stuff, and a lot of *Johnny* comes from my teenage years. But it was "adult" in the sense that there was murder and characters

This spread: Artwork from the series bible by Jhonen.



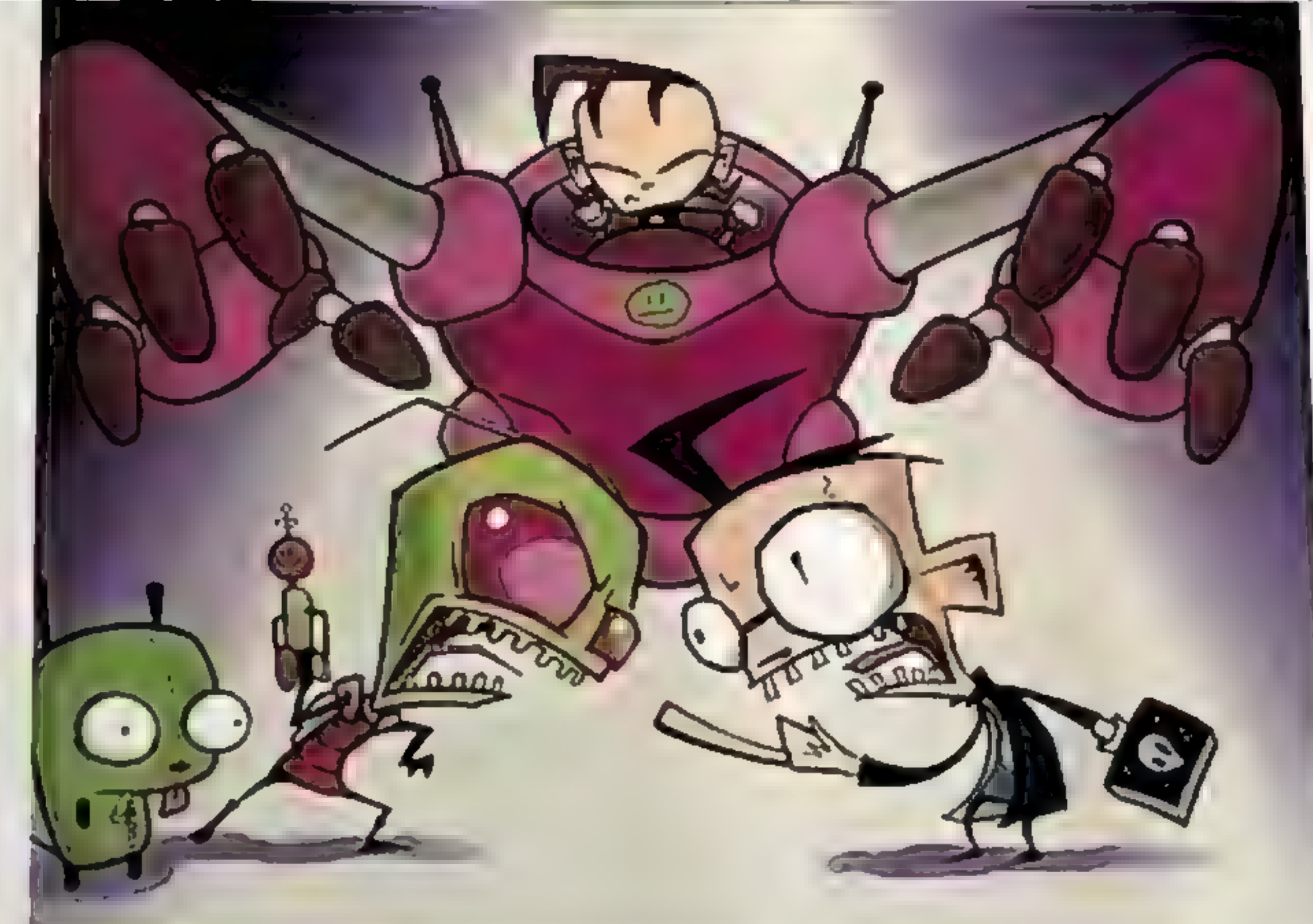


cursing, which to too many people is what "adult" is. But it was still pretty childish.

It was never weird for me to develop something like *Invader Zim*. I grew up loving all kinds of stuff, so it's almost offensive to have people be weirded out at the thought of me coming up with something that kids can watch.

This was still kind of right on the edge of *Ren and Stimpy*, so I wasn't thinking, "Cartoons are stupid and for little kids." I was just thinking, "I can maybe do something that someone would like as much as I like *Ren and Stimpy*!"

Nickelodeon's pitch to me was that they wanted a show that was going to appeal to older kids, and not something to compete with, I don't know, some cuddly show from the time. Tonally, they were looking for something that was going to be a little more mature. It didn't work out! [laughs]



**Mary:** I asked him to come up with an idea for a series. I was passionate about his work, and I think he trusted me, and I'm glad he did. He pitched *Zim*, and I loved it. I felt that there was a tone that older kids and adults could get into, but I felt the core characters and the core situation and the whole premise of the show was very kid-relatable.

Mary became the champion and steward of Jhonen's project about a little green invader. Jhonen set to work expanding his initial ideas and sketches into a production bible. In it, the Irken race is initially referred to as "the NOYING, from the planet Irk."

**Jhonen:** It was just a stupid play on words—the word annoying. Which I quickly got rid of to simplify things.

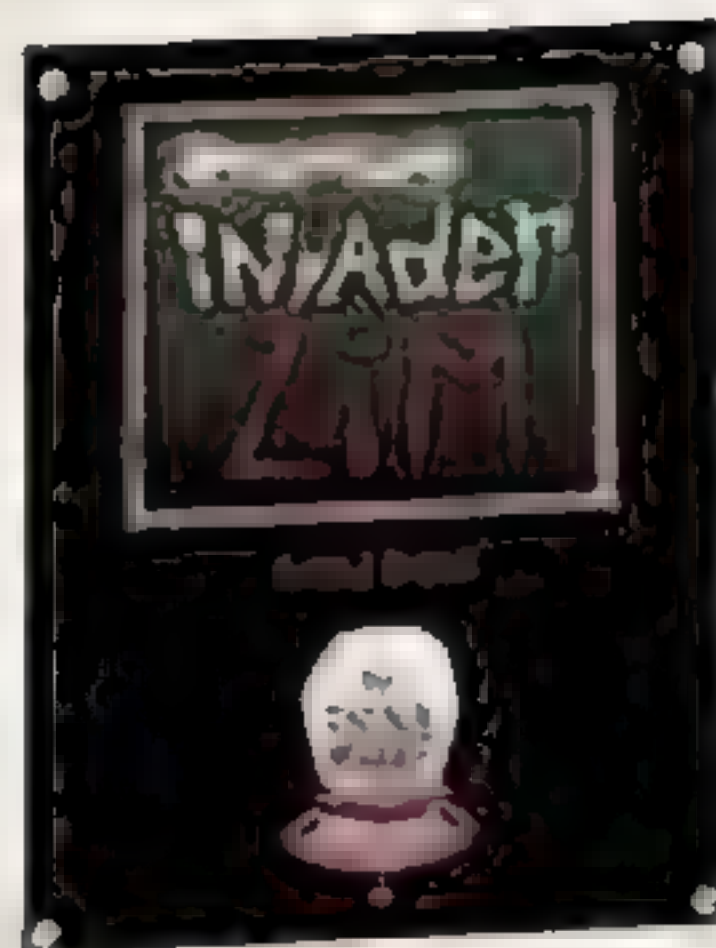
The bible was complete with story springboards, many of which became series episodes. One idea that never quite made it even into the bible was the story of Zim and the sleep weasels.

**Jhonen:** There was an idea that was always in the back of my mind and I thought we'd get around to it. It was something with Zim and all these filthy weasels: Zim tried to put the entire world to sleep, but in order to do so, he had to convince the whole planet to put these weasels on their heads. Sleep weasels. They put you to sleep, and they were weasels, and you put them on your head. But the entire joke was that you had to do it willingly. So Zim was trying to make these weasels a fashionable thing. We never made that episode.

(Continued on page 32)







Zim is perhaps most aptly described as a little green guy with a fierce and overwhelming confidence and persistence, an awe-inspiring work ethic, and a bottomless reservoir of energy.

His stature is describable as "little" not only here on Earth, where any descendant of ZFK would be considered diminutive, but also among his own people, where height determines one's standing in society. Considered fairly repellent in his appearance, in addition to being a runt, Zim was born into a life of detriment and treated as one who could expect little social advancement. ZIM's superpower, however, is his overwhelming tenacity, never acknowledging the elements in his that, to an outside observer, might be seen as liabilities in his personality and physique. Even though he might appear half as capable as any given task, he will be twice as eager as the next NOYNG to tackle it, making it with a display of obscene effort, however abject the task may be and despite a total lack of any preparation on his part.

His devotion to Blazen Earth provides a few nights into these personality traits. Despite the fact that he is sent to the planet furthest from those affected by Operation Impending Doom is a thinly veiled attempt to get rid of him (Earth isn't even on the flying map of the Galaxy, it's penciled in on a piece of paper taped to the wall next to it the same cosmic footnote), he adheres ferociously and dives into his mission, unwilling to let anything stand in his way.

Pursuing a supernatural emotional equilibrium, Zim will always fall back into a state of paranoia, dread and the desire to come out on top, whether he emerged victorious or not himself temporarily vanquished.

It would be a mistake to assume that Zim is stupid. A more accurate adjective might be "misguided," thanks largely to the gaping hole in his head where information on Earth should be. Unfortunately, most of the information he's getting now is from his fellow schoolchildren, who, while by no means mentally deficient, have a completely different set of priorities and a more imaginative way of looking at things. Zim has no concept of this fact and therefore his reaction to being given "THE COOTIES," for example, might be to march directly into a teacher's office and demand, with straight facial urgency that he "explain these COOTIES of which the children speak!" Being the "green kid," and definitely different, makes him exceedingly vulnerable to these types of attacks (not to mention the fact that kids will always come in on the kid they can get the most dramatic reaction out of).

Zim makes many assumptions about Earth and her strange inhabitants, most of which are wrong and all of which he takes as absolute fact. Upon observing that all human families have at least one garbage can, he assumes they **MUST** be vitally important, perhaps even sacred. What an awesome show of force it would be to replace the garbage can belonging to a bullying classmate. How devastating it would be! The humans would lose all feelings of security and abandon Earth to their evil President. He might even rush back home and watch the television, waiting in vain for the flood of broadcasts announcing the ingully garbage can devastation that has blighted the planet.



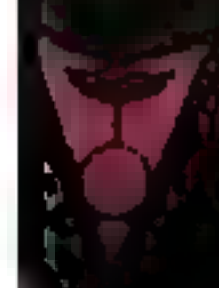
One of Zim's mighty weaknesses is an unseen enemy, himself. He's changed to things he has no idea he's changed to with no law or order to his reactions, so they can pretty much manifest themselves in countless ways. His head can suddenly swell up to three times its normal size, he can be assailed by nightmarish smearing fits, his entire body can liquify, or his voice can be extremely altered, and these things almost always happen to him at the worst possible time, when Zim feels he has to be at the top of his form. The sources of his pain are pretty clear to the viewer, sometimes accompanied by hyper fast scenes with floating bacteria and then following it with Zim's delicate little body, but Zim is normally baffled by the sudden sickness.



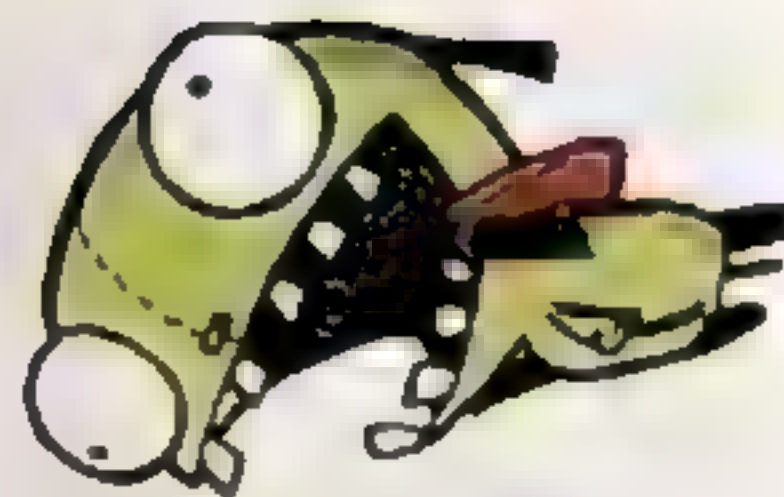
At the end of every day, Zim reports to the ALMIGHTY TALLEST, from whom an acknowledgment of any kind (whether real or imagined) will fill him with unimaginable IN ADERS pride (it's like the normal pride, but with more stuff in it). He practically lives for the respect of his leaders, who usually meet his reports with indifference or mock interest. This doesn't stop him from a beautiful and proud display regarding his stupendous accomplishments, accomplishments that would make any very observant scratch their heads in wonder at the meaningless.

The real satisfaction, however, comes from being able to boast to his alien IN ADER peers about what amazing and death-defying things he has done in the course of his stay on Earth. NOYNG IN ADERS are highly competitive, almost to a freakish extent, and Zim is no exception. Gatherings on the home planet, or more correctly the common carrier planet, Comenta, are frequent and filled with IN ADERS all trying to blow each other away with tales of incredible feats.

Zim's presence on Earth is not limited to his impersonation of a schoolkid. He also has a variety of different Earth disguises. Wearing only a giant beard, he can seamlessly blend in as an old man. A disturbingly tiny, vomit green old man.







Dib Diddar, the son of the paragon, he's the elementary school for Diddar (with slightly more emotional range). Dib is the "gifted child" of his school, capable of far more scientifically and intellectually than any of his classmates, and he knows it. He is the son of the one and only PROFESSOR MEMBRANE, the man responsible for thousands of amazing inventions and miraculous cures that he discovers every day, as well as the ever-popular but a sham "ASK ALISTAIR WHERE!"

Aside from being a fearless supernatural investigator, Dib is quite the little scientist / inventor himself, not that his father notices. You see, dad has become more to amazing scientific discoveries, so he will respond to his son's Great Robot the same way he might to his daughter's lumpy father's day sculpture. This will not do for Dib, who wants to express his father more than anything in the world.

ZIM's arrival into Dib's life provides him with exactly what is needed to trip the wires in his head, setting off his own chain of events. His "truth is out there" fixation could find no better focus than the kid who is so obviously not from here, and yet no one but he (and a select few others) can even see the truth. And how could dad not be impressed by a son who confidently exposed the evil alien threat and saved the planet from impending DOOM (which father couldn't be proud)?

Dib and Zim are natural born adversaries and, probably more because of their similarities than because of their differences, reliably competitive, constantly comparing toys and throwing scientific insults at one another.

Intensely focused on things scientific, including the exposure and capture of his otherworldly neighbor, Dib has little time for anything along the lines of playground soccer, sports, and kids get up, making him a pretty easy target for abuse from his classmates. With a brain capacity the size of the moon, Dib knows kids can be cruel, and just doesn't pay his detractors any mind, though, deep down just past his neck, you just know he wants to win them all with the things he knows he is capable of.

Despite his intense nature, he's still a kid, and is ruled by curiosity which, when coupled with a mighty intellect, can get him into some pretty incredible situations where strange and terrible truths may be discovered. His response to these discoveries could easily be squealing and running like a baby. It's not that he's a chicken, it's just that, while he may spend a huge amount of time planning to get somewhere, not much thought goes into getting himself out of whatever outlandish situation he's landed into. In order to deal with some of the bullies at school, for instance, Dib might create a pair of giant robotic arms that would fit over his own arms, making him into some sort of basic monster. The arms do the trick, as the bullies run away screaming, but then his mechanical appendages go crazy, smashing everything in sight, with Dib still strapped in and being dragged around like a puppet.



Aside from his father, Dib could care less what the world or large chunks of her. He is content with his passion for delving into the spooky world of the unexplained. Still, a guy needs an audience, a confident of sorts, and it is here that his younger sister GAZ comes into play, whether she wants to be involved or not. In addition to her role as reluctant sidekick, Gaz also finds herself the unwitting test subject for Dib's gadgets, chemicals, and alien hunting devices. His experiments aren't the result of any B feelings he has toward her, he does them out of necessity, not having any other place to test things out. He does feel a little guilt for the pain and embarrassment inflicted on her and tries to make up for them in various ways, but unfortunately, these "apologies" almost always involve another experiment. After feeling guilty for putting a test subject in his sister's hands which caused her to uncontrollably dance a merry little jig on her food, he might give her a doll. The thing is, the doll is a prototype mind reading robot which absorbs the knowledge and information about the people who touch it. The doll, of course, goes bad and ends up escaping, spouting off God's deep, dark secrets to whoever will listen.

Dib is also a member of a super secret society of paranormal buff's known as the SWOLLEN EYEBALL NETWORK, which is as close to a group of his peers as he can muster. It is among their ranks that he finds most can't handle, if or more about Swollen Eyeball Network, turn to the section called Secondary Characters.) Dib has spent as much time previous to his Zim encounter making what appear to other people to be preposterous statements about things like Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster, and Were-dickens and claiming to have proof of alien existence, that his ruling out ZIM as an alien is not taken seriously by anyone.



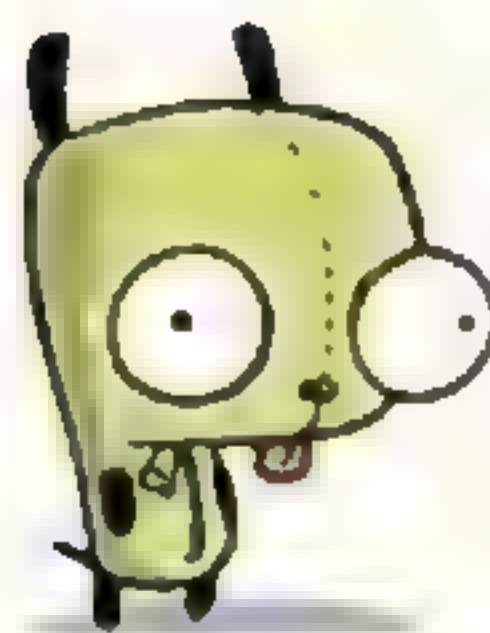
Four pages from the Insider Zim comic bible created by Jonon that describe two of the main characters Zim and Dib in detail. The

twenty-eight page bible also features descriptions of Gaz, Giz, the Robe Parents, Mr. Bitters, Professor Membrane, the Almighty Tallest, Swollen Eye-

ball Members, the Spooky Chihuahua (a harmless dog that creeps out Zim), and the Friends of the Party Saver (a group of U.F.O.-watching morons).

Top: Additional artwork from the bible.





## SAMPLE EPISODES

1.) Zill's opportunity of redemption. Having almost completely destroyed his home planet during OPERATION DEBUNDING DOOR part II, Zill was too small to see over the dashboard of the giant robot he was commanding. He volunteers to take on any role for the second OPERATION DEBUNDING DOOR. Not having forgotten Zill's previous service record, the ALMIGHTY TALLEST assigns him to EARTH, a planet they have no interest in. Zill is humbled and begins his mission as an intergalactic spy on the strange new world full of really mean kids, horrifying cafeteria foods, and the equally Ominous. It's here that Zill takes on his disguise as a little Earth boy, and sets up his secret lair underneath a little house. In school, he not only excels in his studies for the first time, but also the boy who will be his arch-enemy on Earth, Dib, with his little sister, Goo.

2.) Dib, fresh from meeting Zill at school, wants to attack the mysterious new kid, and show the world, and his dad, that there is an alien amongst them. He assigns Goo the role of an assistant investigator. It's the latest in his attempts to get his dad to notice him and acknowledge his genius. He is dumbfounded by how (MAYBE) she does not notice that the green boy is an alien, and tries, with increasing desperation, to prove the glaring fact through progressively elaborate means. The attempts fail, and the difficulty of his quest becomes apparent. Goo knows Zill is an alien, but doesn't quite respond to it with her brother's fervor.

3.) Show and tell day! Knowing how important a good showing is to maintaining the appearance of humanity, Zill studies like a madman all week for the coming Friday. Every second blinks the passing of seconds on the clock. Each day at school, the kids, like little goblins, ask what he'll be presenting, adding to the terror and anxiety. Finally, he feels secure, but his little belly, and decides it will be a live showing, as he feels it will make him even like a normal boy. The boy who loves his pet. He practices holding it, and petting it, sneezing really all the while. Not knowing it's the cat making him sneeze, he goes forth with the plan. Dib, meanwhile, plans on using his new ALIEN RADAR machine at show and tell to expose Zill right then and there. Before he gets a chance to use it, though, Zill, at show and tell, collapses from exhaustion in a phlegmy pool, eyes swollen, belly still held valiantly in hand, and is dragged off and sent home. Dib frantically tries chasing Zill to use his machine before Zill is taken away, but is foiled by one last explosion Zill causes, which destroys the radar.

4.) The dreaded Teacher-Parent night. Zill, not having any real parents on Earth, must convert his fake, door-snooping robot-parents into true raising, and speaking parent substitutes. Only having one night to prepare them, he ends up with two hideous, really creepy looking parents with glazed, stiff expressions, and limited speech capabilities. He spends the entire night frantically out and being embarrassed by BOB and DAD as they perplex, and frighten everyone. As the night progresses, the robots' bodies begin to fall apart. Dad tries some punch, almost making his head explode. Any kid can relate to being a little embarrassed by their parents, why not Zill too?

5.) Zill discovers that a new kid in class is an alien, like himself, another NOTHING INVADER, in fact, trying to replace Zill on Earth. This new alien is definitely crafty, and has no honor as a soldier. Determined to be the only alien spy on the planet, Zill must find a way to make the new alien 'stay' a miserable one. This time, Zill actually goes for it with Dib to expose the new guy as an alien. They eventually succeed during class, and the President shows up immediately to tell the new alien invader to, "Go on, alien." The alien leaves. Dib takes this opportunity to try, again, to tell everyone that Zill too is an alien, but by then the bell has rung and everyone, including the President, runs as fast as they can out the door.

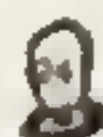
6.) Zill and Dib are arguing about who is the most egomaniac, so they decide to settle things in a contest, grumpy way. They BATTLE IN CLAY ROBOTS. The battle is to take place at the school science fair, as the enormous robots made by less suspicious there. The huge machines actually look like hilariously goofy, illustrated versions of their creators, so Dib's machine looks like a big giant Dib, and Zill's looks like a giant Zill. The battle is full of vicious attacks like the BIGHTY TURBO NOODLE, and BIONIC STEAMPOLLER (essentially, bad, grotesquely overblown version of classic kid games). Both machines are eventually destroyed. Both Zill and Dib get most credit lost in the dashboard after school, but Dib also gets grounded. Zill is victorious.

7.) Zill's wig goes awry. As a reaction to the space alien in Zill's head, the fibers of the hairpiece become sentient, and the wig is PUFFY (V2). Threatening to fly off and reveal Zill as an alien, the wig forces his best to control it's every move, and controls his every move. Zill must destroy the life force of the wig, or be doomed to a life of servitude. The wig speaks in a James Earl Jones voice.

8.) Dib is captured and held prisoner by Zill, who plans on conducting sinister experiments on his little P.O. It's up to Goo to rescue her brother from Zill's orbiting spaceship, before dinner, otherwise her dad won't take her to eat at Goo's favorite restaurant, Batty's Pizza Hut. Goo must journey into outer space for the big final showdown.

9.) As an allergic reaction to the combination of milk and chicken served for lunch in the school cafeteria, Zill's nose begins to swell up to alarming proportions. (Not good when trying to keep a low profile). As the school day progresses, the head grows larger, and more ponderously bulky, as Zill tries desperately to find a cure for this new development before his presentation at the end of the day. Finally, as the school day draws to a close, Zill makes a front of the class, his head resting upon a sharkbarron, and tries to keep cool, until his head explodes in a messy, water balloon-like blast. This returns his head to normal size. He takes this opportunity to flee and lay low for a while.

10.) Knowing that his dad HAS to spend time with the kids on his television show, Dib plots to be one of those kids but has to make it through the strenuous and terrifying qualifications tests and trials in order to make it. There is an elimination course with many other wacky games kids. It's sort of an American Gladiators mentality for little kids. Very much like a Mortal Kombat format, Dib must pass through a procession of increasingly sinister and powerful kids. Quoted out of final victory, Dib decides he must take the cheating movie's place on the show before or 'lose' AT ANY COST.





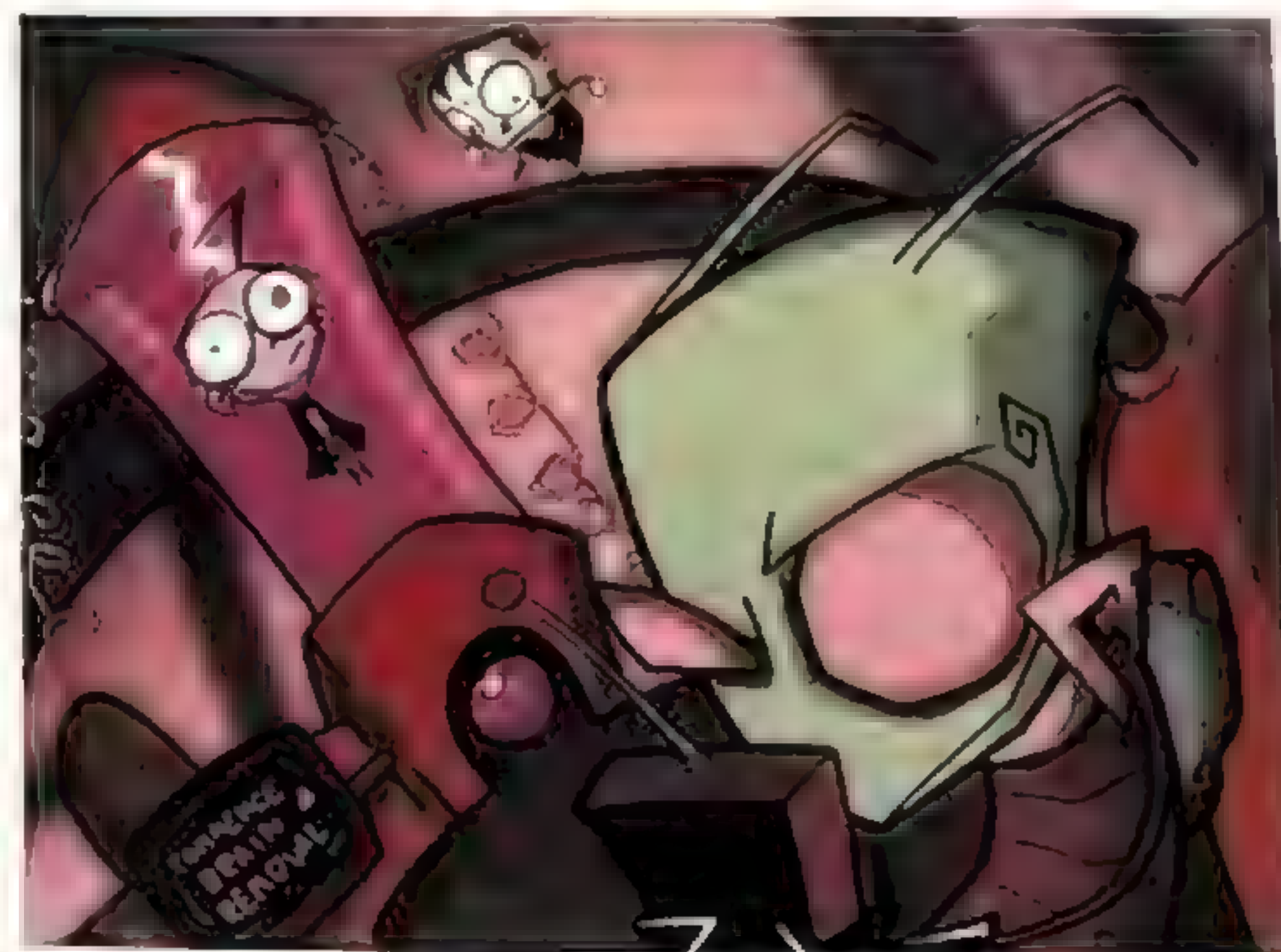


8) In an attempt to make it easier for his alien fleet to take over Earth, ZIB created the YAWN OF TERROR. The super yawn is spread through contact with people infected with the yawn, and spreads as each time a person yawns each yawn is more severe, stretching a person's head into unbearably gaping maws of sleepiness. The ultimate effect is a deep, deep sleep. ZIB finds that he is not immune to the YAWN OF TERROR, and has to come up with an antidote, which eventually saves the rest of the world as well.

9) ZIB and GIR travel to a distant NGING colony in outer space to attend a global progress convention where other NGINGS gather to discuss their feelings, and also to check out the latest in alien spy technology. Ironically, though, it's a popularity contest to see who can express the ALBIGNTY TALLEST with their tales of bravery and dangerous encounters. GIB and GIB, however, are the real spies here, having followed ZIB all the way to this far off alien get-together to gather more info on the extra-dimensional threat.

10) FOODTOWN! ZIB's smacking suspects and growing feelings of underlying dread over the course of the book break are not quick enough to save him from being right in the middle of the most nightmarish food fight in Earth history. This should be presented in a very graphic (in a culinary sort of way) way-like way, with the savage human beings mowing the animals and launching all manner of edibles around.

11) ZIB decides he overthinks the evil, alien eating monster that lives in an old, empty house, going on information supplied to him by GIR. GIR, feeling the pressure from his master to give some valuable news about new lands, made the monster thing up, and soon regrets it as he is dropped along with ZIB in search of this new menace to their safety. GIR, not wanting to be found out in his lies, decides to play the role of the monster while also trying to be by ZIB's side to convince him that the monster has been successfully destroyed.



**Storyboard:** An additional three pages from *Invader Zim* show bible created by Jhonen Vasquez featuring sample episode

springboards, or brief descriptions of the core story elements, that could serve as the basis for episode scripts. Many of these springboards

from the bible did inspire future *Invader Zim* series episodes.

**Above:** Additional art from the bible,





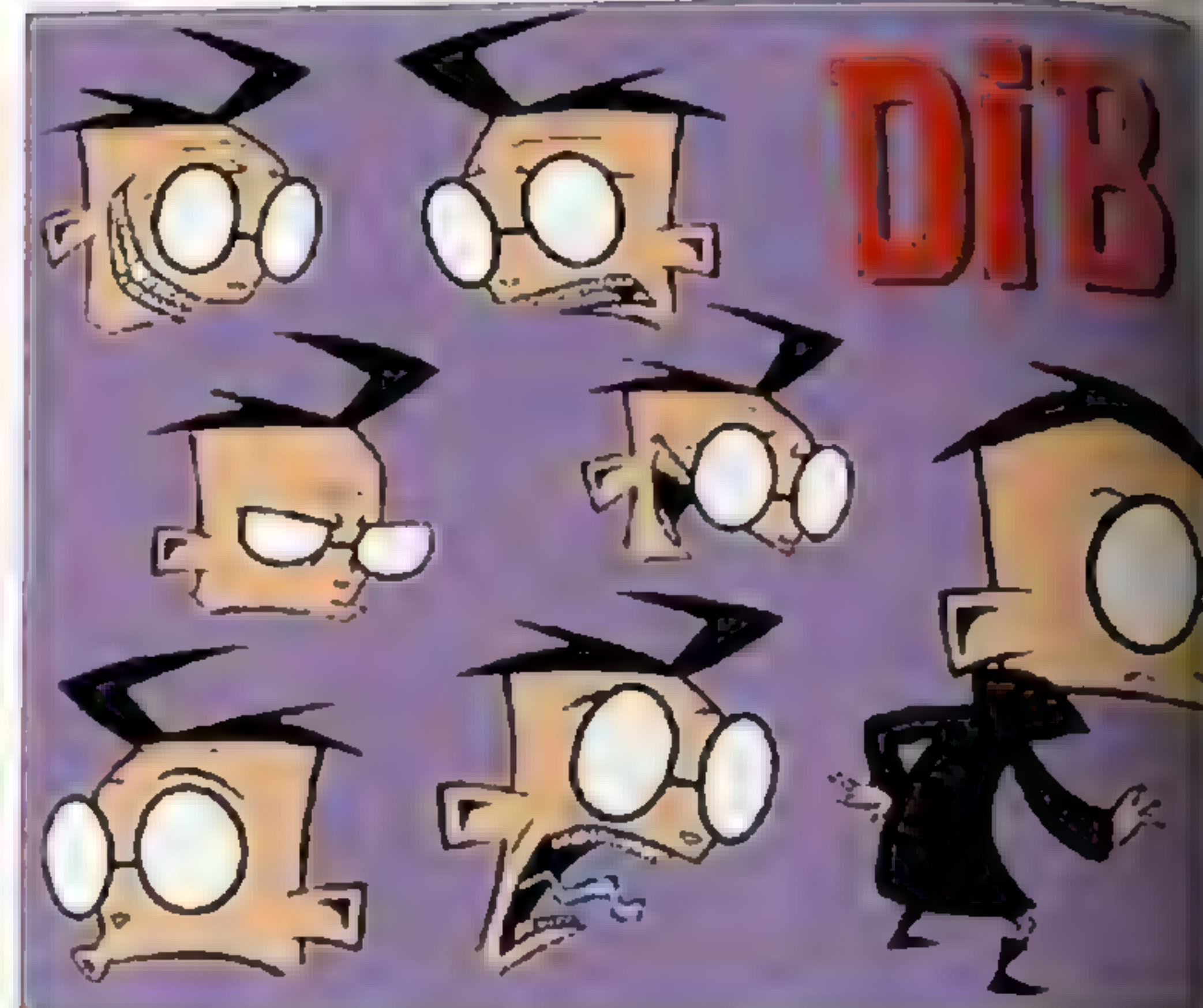
The proposed structure of the series was also different than how it turned out. Similar to the Fox Kids/The WB series *Animaniacs*, the original Zim bible outlined episodes that would have short interstitial cartoons among longer segments, as well as stories that would focus on different main characters, each taking center stage. That idea also was rejected once the series went into production to favor a two eleven-minute episode structure, mainly starring Zim.

**Jhonen:** The network wanted a clear main character, and they wanted it to be far more structured. I really thought it would be split down the middle—that it was a show about Zim and it was a show about Dib. It wasn't a show just about Zim, where he's got this nemesis kid that shows up every once in a while. We tried, and we got a few episodes through where it was mainly about Dib, but it was

all this work to get that to happen. I was trying not to make a show with a villain and a hero; it was supposed to be more ambiguous, depending on your perspective.

The arrangements were made to create an *Invasion Zim* pilot episode at Nickelodeon Studios in Burbank, California. Jolted from his routine, Jhonen was amused to be suddenly experiencing the daily grind.

**Jhonen:** I was so used to just working at home and choosing my own hours. Commuting to the studio was cool at first! It was almost like play-acting. I'd find myself stuck in traffic with a ton of people and I'd just be in my car smiling to myself thinking "Haha look! I'm one of these people now!" It took a little while for that to wear off.



The pilot was completed in 1999. Starring Billy West (*The Ren and Stimpy Show*, *Futurama*) as Zim, the story unfolds while covering the basics of the main character relationships and the primary locations of the series. Dib is a kid who thinks that the new kid Zim is an alien; Zim is the new kid who *is* an alien; and Dib's efforts to unmask Zim and Zim's counterstrikes create escalating chaotic destruction. Gaz, Gir, and Ms. Bitters are introduced, as well as the locations of the school, Zim's secret lair, and the Membrane children's house. The full visual identity of the series wasn't completely developed by this point, but the pilot features many of the stylish elements of the subsequent series, such as the extreme camera angles and some comics-style graphics.

With the pilot complete, it was now up to the network to make a decision about whether or not to green-light a full season of initial episodes. There was focus testing.

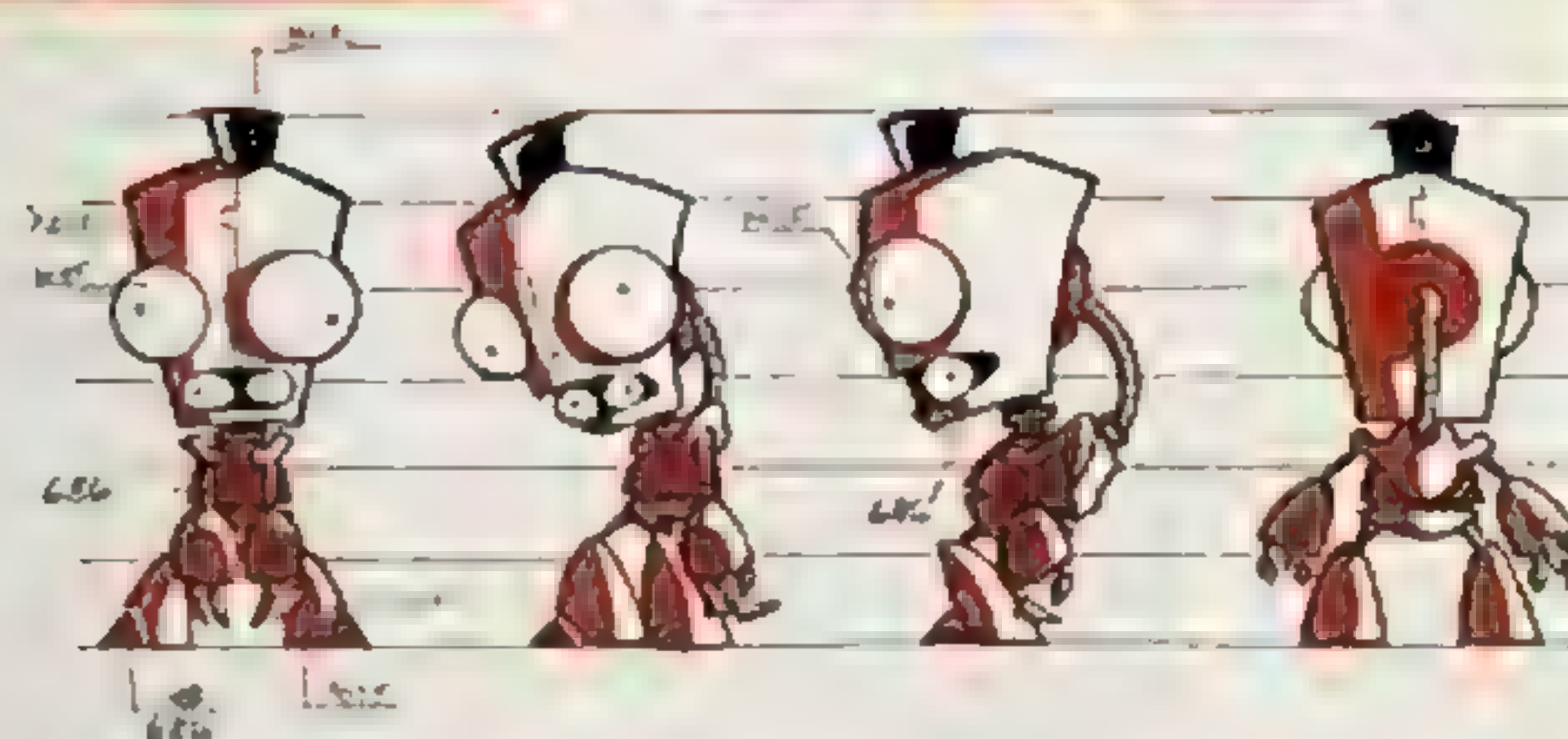
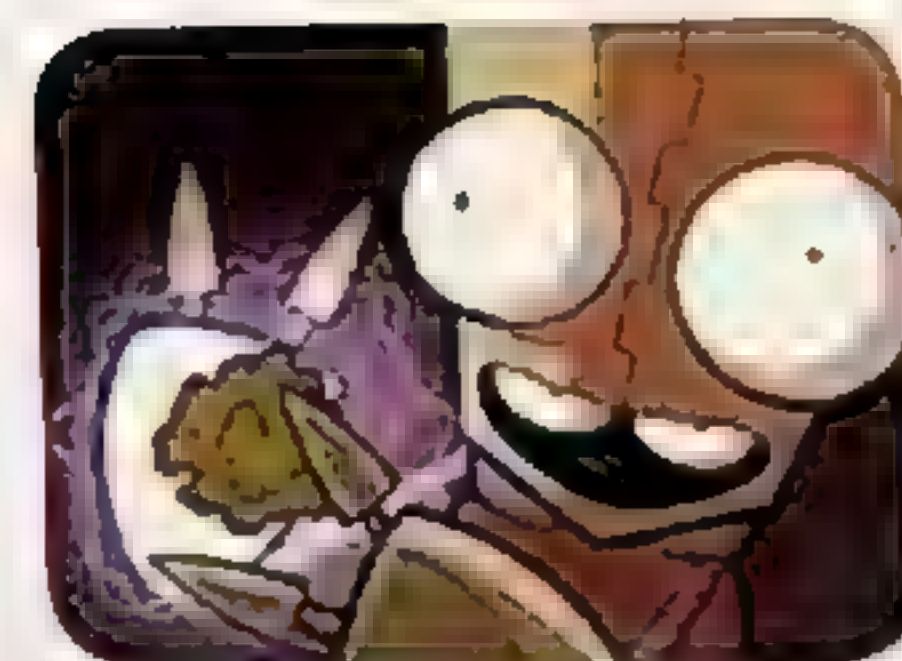
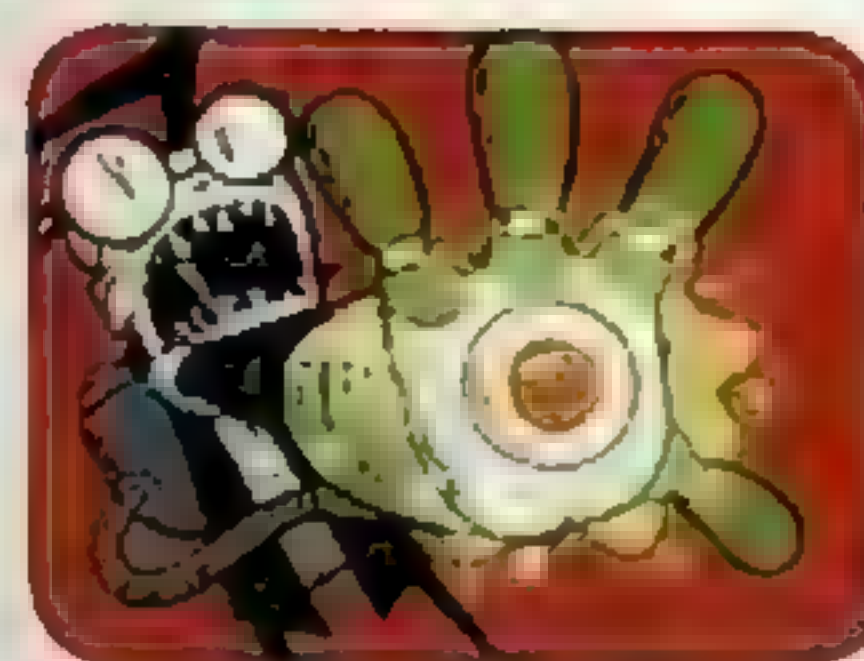
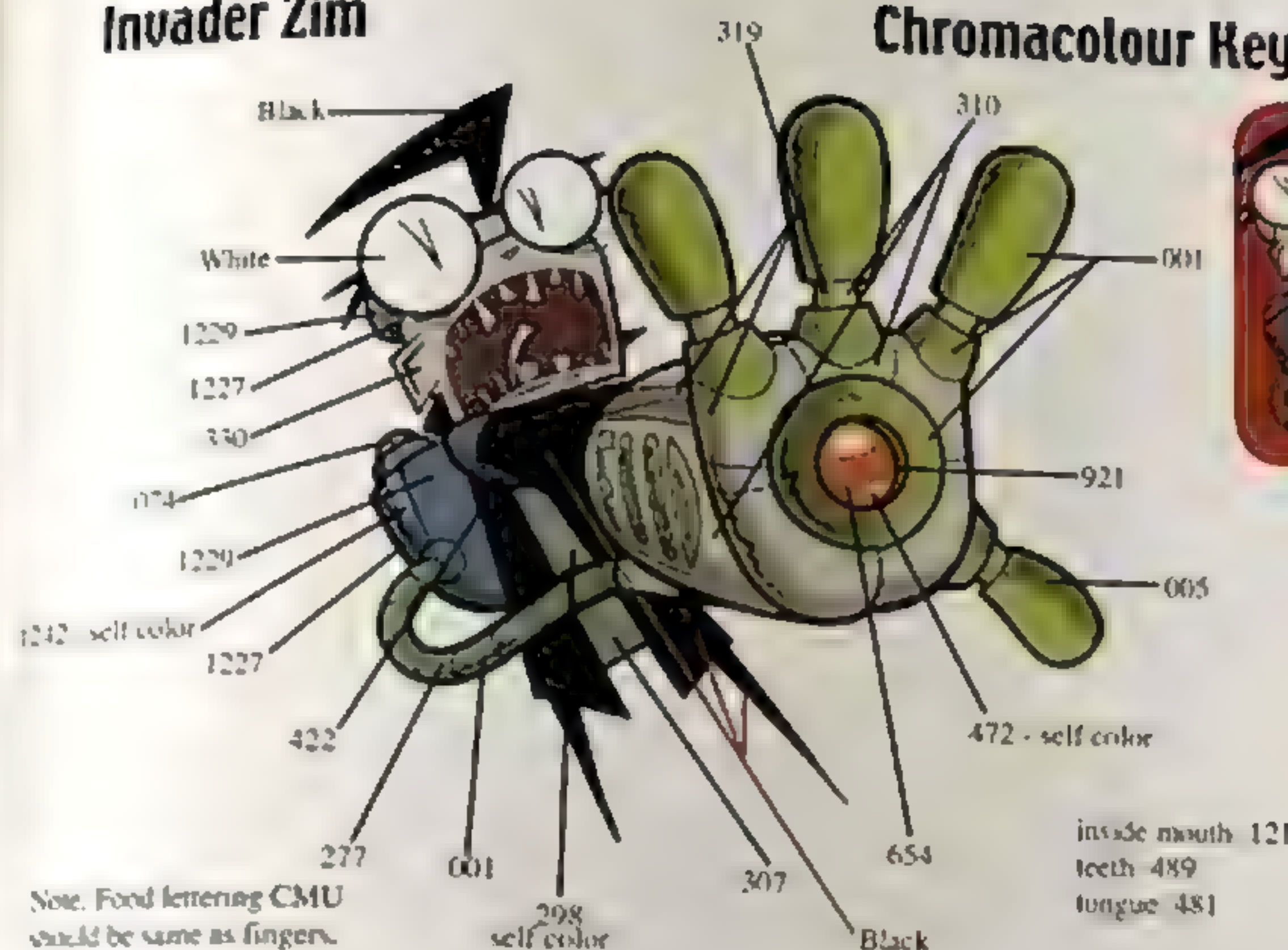
Above: Expression model sheets from the *Invasion Zim* pilot which was developed by Jhonen and produced and directed by Jordan

Reichek. The models of Zim and Dib are familiar, but stray further from Jhonen's design style than the series proper



# Invader Zim

## Chromacolour Key



Jhonen: There wasn't really a big moment marking the completion of the pilot. There wasn't any big celebration—it was just like, "Annnd it's done." It was actually kind of anticlimactic and clandestine, really. It was out of my hands. There were screenings, but they were screening it to audiences of kids with wires jammed into their brains or something like that. As a creator you're not part of those things. It's just executives wearing black shrouds in screening rooms full of kids. All I knew is that it was happening somewhere out there, and that it tested well enough that it could go into production.

Think the pilot, in a lot of ways, was me obviously or subconsciously trying to make a show for kids, because it's very mild compared to ones. It's Zim and Dib, and they have a food launcher. It's not what the series turned out to be. To me it's just this weird footnote that I can look at

and say, "Isn't it strange that the series came from this?" Because I look at it and I can't relate to even having made it any more.

It did its job in a lot of ways. A pilot exists as not just a way of showing a network or whoever it is you're pitching to what this thing is going to be, but once you've made it, it's also something for you to look at and decide, "Do I want it to be this?" And I looked at the Zim pilot and was like, "Oh man, that's weak." It's fine, it's cute, it's very silly. But by the time the series had started to get developed, I stopped thinking in terms of the audience. I do my best stuff when I'm just having fun, and I'm not trying to think about making the perfect thing—I'm just trying to make the thing that keeps me interested as I'm working on it.

Zim is kind of like my comics: a mess of terrible ideas alongside things that turned out

to work, and it kind of has a personality. It's not engineered. My favorite stuff out there in the world is the work where I really feel the presence of the creator, or a personality of the people working on a show, and that is what Zim turned out to be. I watch the series now and I'm like, "Holy crap, why did we do that? That's horrible!" and then there's other stuff where I'm like, "My God, I can't believe that worked." I never approached the series thinking, "What's going to work?" or studying and focus-testing—it just kind of came out of, "Wouldn't it be dumb if we tried this?" and we'd try it!

I like to think of my favorite stuff as an interesting mix of hits and misses. Like your friends, the people that you like. Like, *people*. Versus a *product*. They are flawed. But you keep coming back to them.

In a lot of ways, I feel like if we had made a show that was more like the pilot we could have

Above: Additional model sheets and two stills from the pilot episode, one of which shows the

featured color key in action with additional special effects layered onto the food-launcher glove.





been more successful, at least commercially. That's a cynical way of looking at stuff. The point was, it was good enough to succeed.

### Team Zim, Assemble!

After the pilot was sold, pitch to the network in 1997, the Zim production got about hiring a full crew. Jhonon was hired as a full animator, with no studio experience to speak of. It just seemed to pair an experienced artist with a series creator, and Nickelodeon brought in Steve Rensel, ex-Klasky/Csupo executive, to be the showrunner. Along with Steve, a group of additional Klasky/Csupo staffers followed him lead to Zim when the word spread about Nickelodeon's new show starting up.

**Mary:** It was very easy for me to staff Zim. Because of Jhonon's artwork, there were so many people that wanted to work on the show.

**Jhonon:** There were sort of two camps in the crew, initially: the Klasky/Csupo contingent, and then there was the rest of the crew that I had plucked from a bunch of other places—Bryan Konietzko, and Aaron Alexovich—who we found at CalArts.

**Aaron Alexovich [character designer]:** I didn't know Jhonon before, which is funny, because our styles are very similar. Going way back, I was at CalArts for about three years. My second year there, I go out to a comic shop with my friend Pete Browngardt—who went on to create *Uncle Grandpa*—and he said, "There's a comic here that I know you're going to like." He puts it in my hand, and it's *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac*. I'm looking at this thing and I'm like, "Did I make this myself in some kind of fugue state? [laughs] Did I

wake up in the middle of the night and make this comic?" Because it was all stuff I love. It was that H. R. Giger influence I love, that spooky but kind of cute, comedy deal. It felt like it came out of my own brain, which was so strange. I was totally into it.

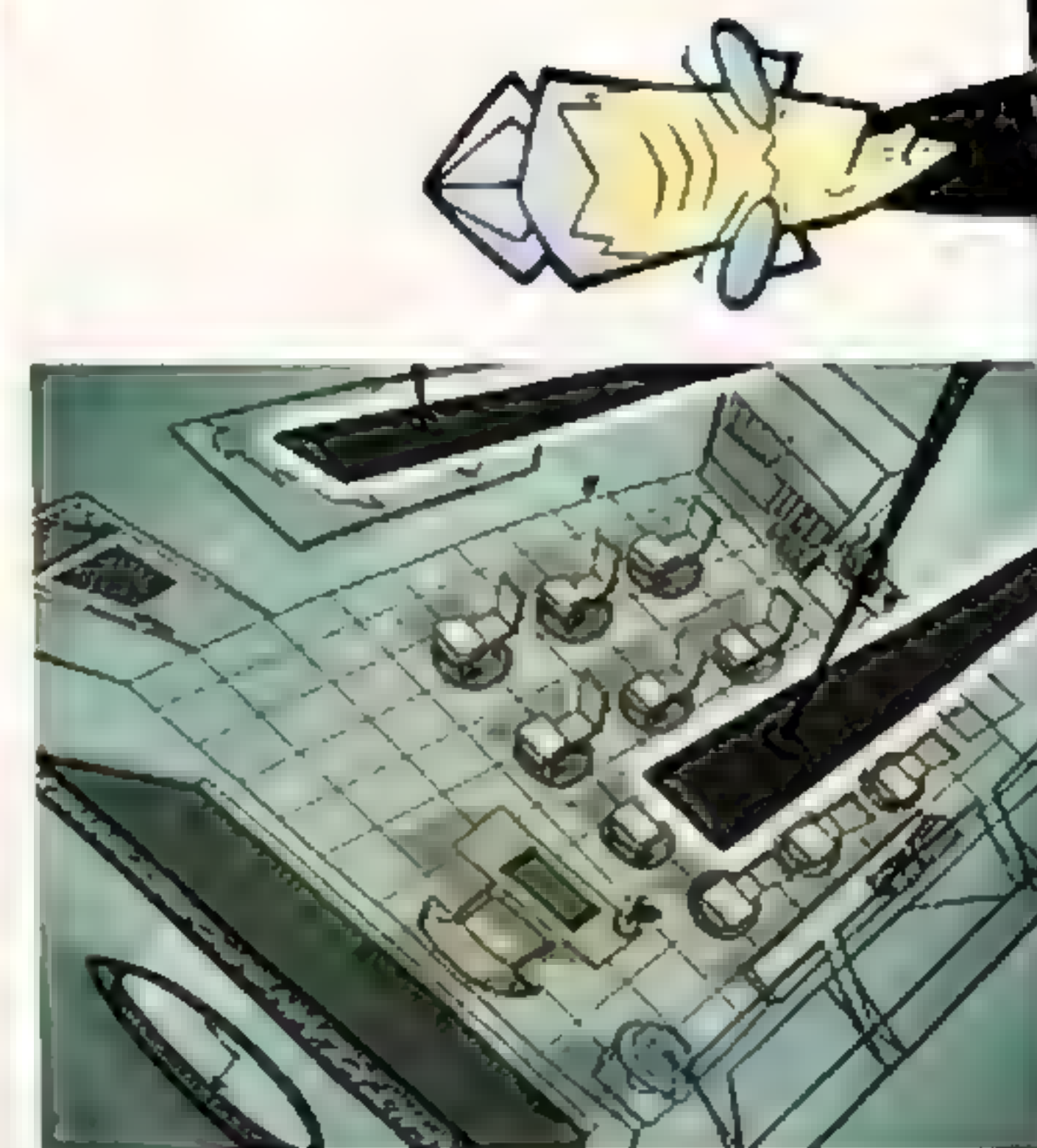
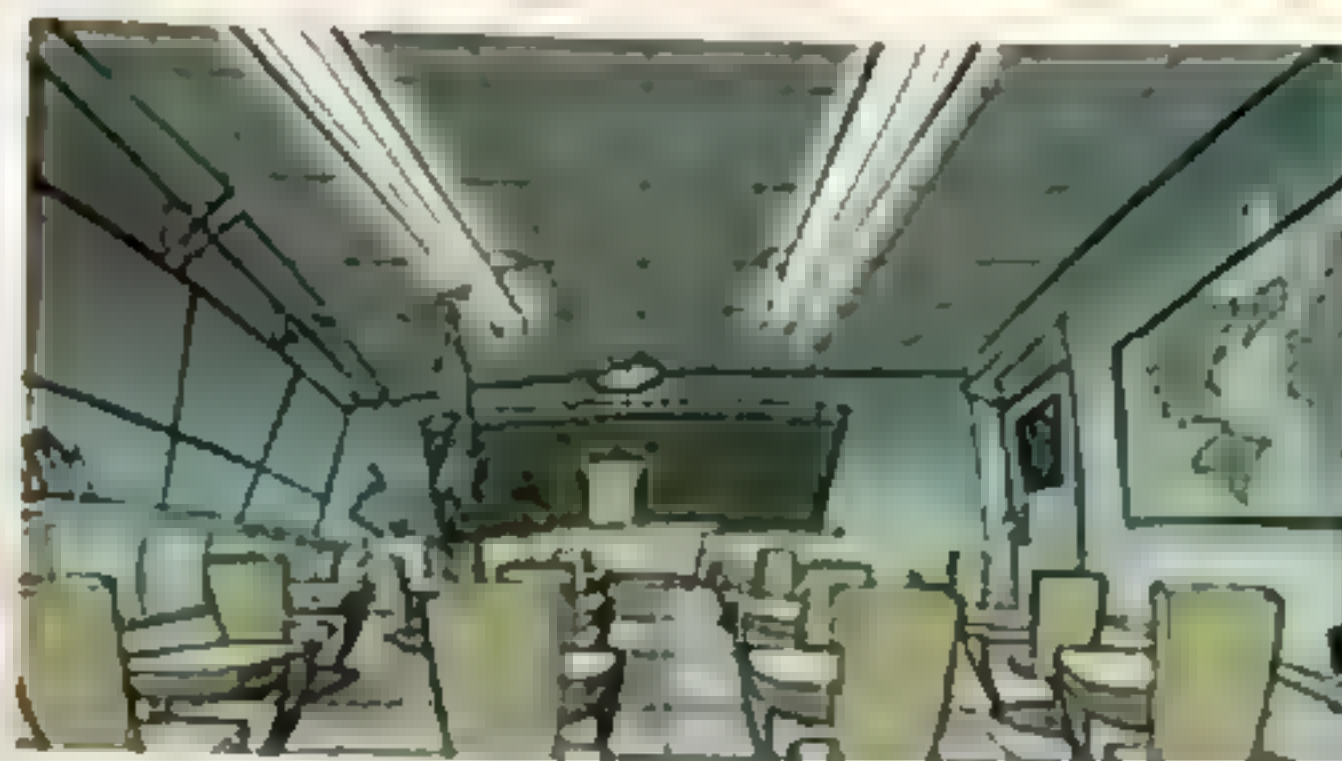
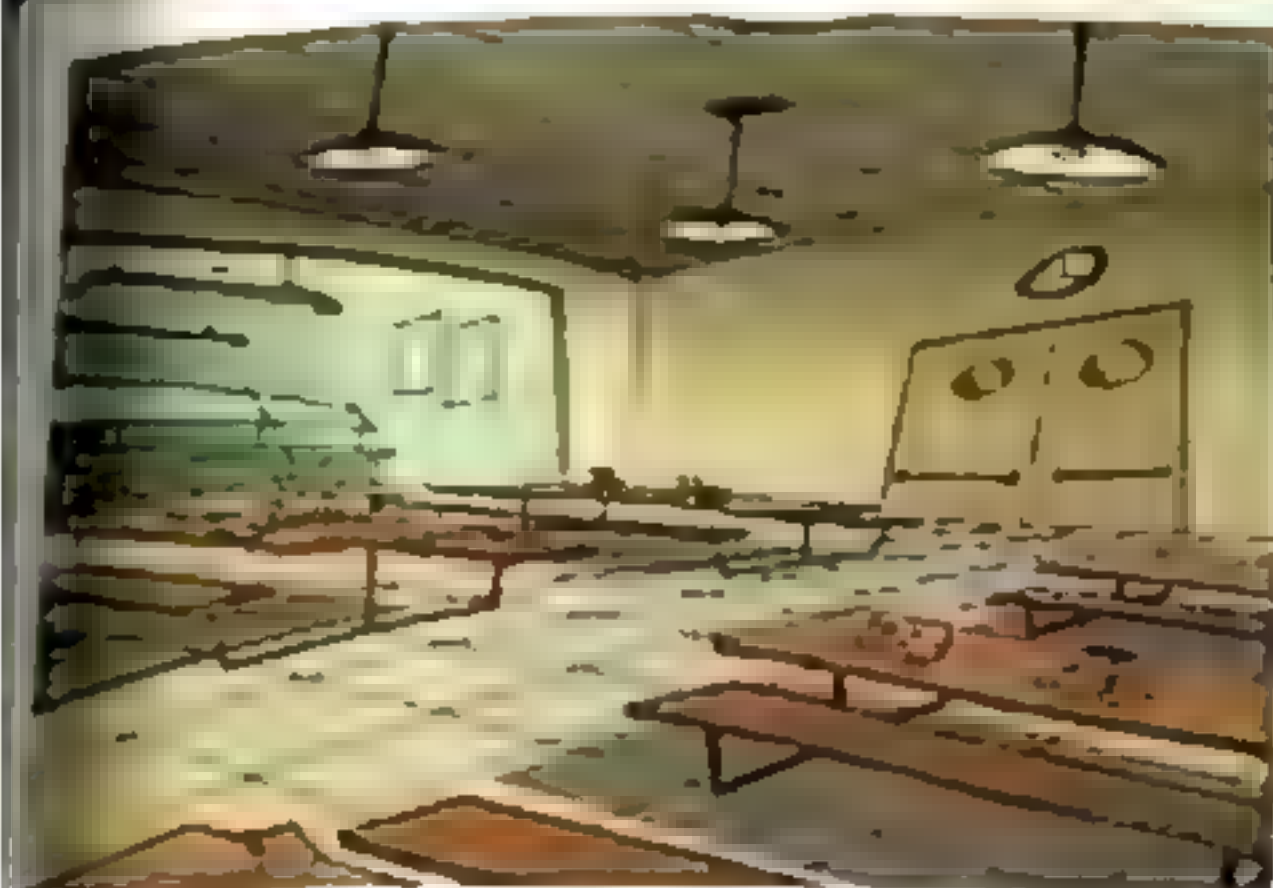
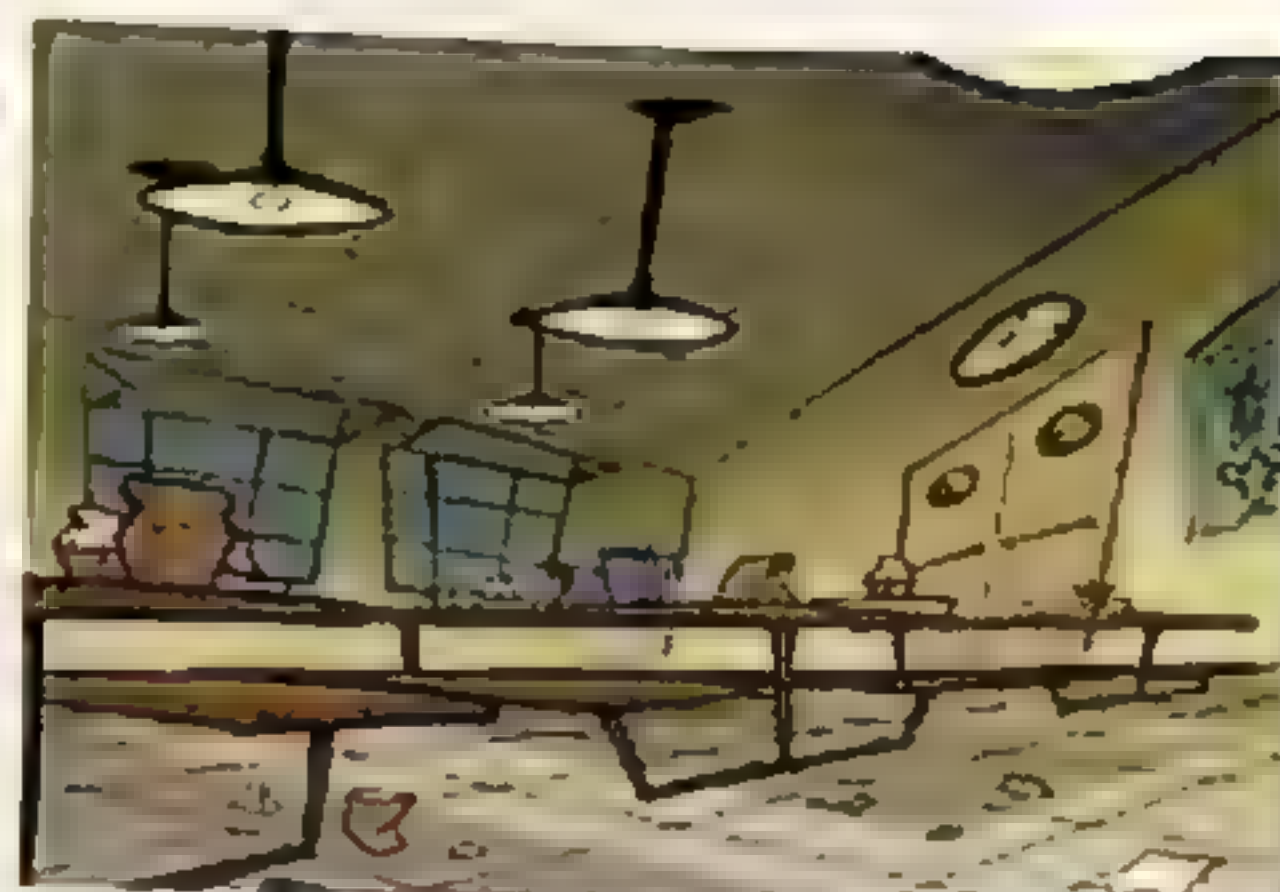
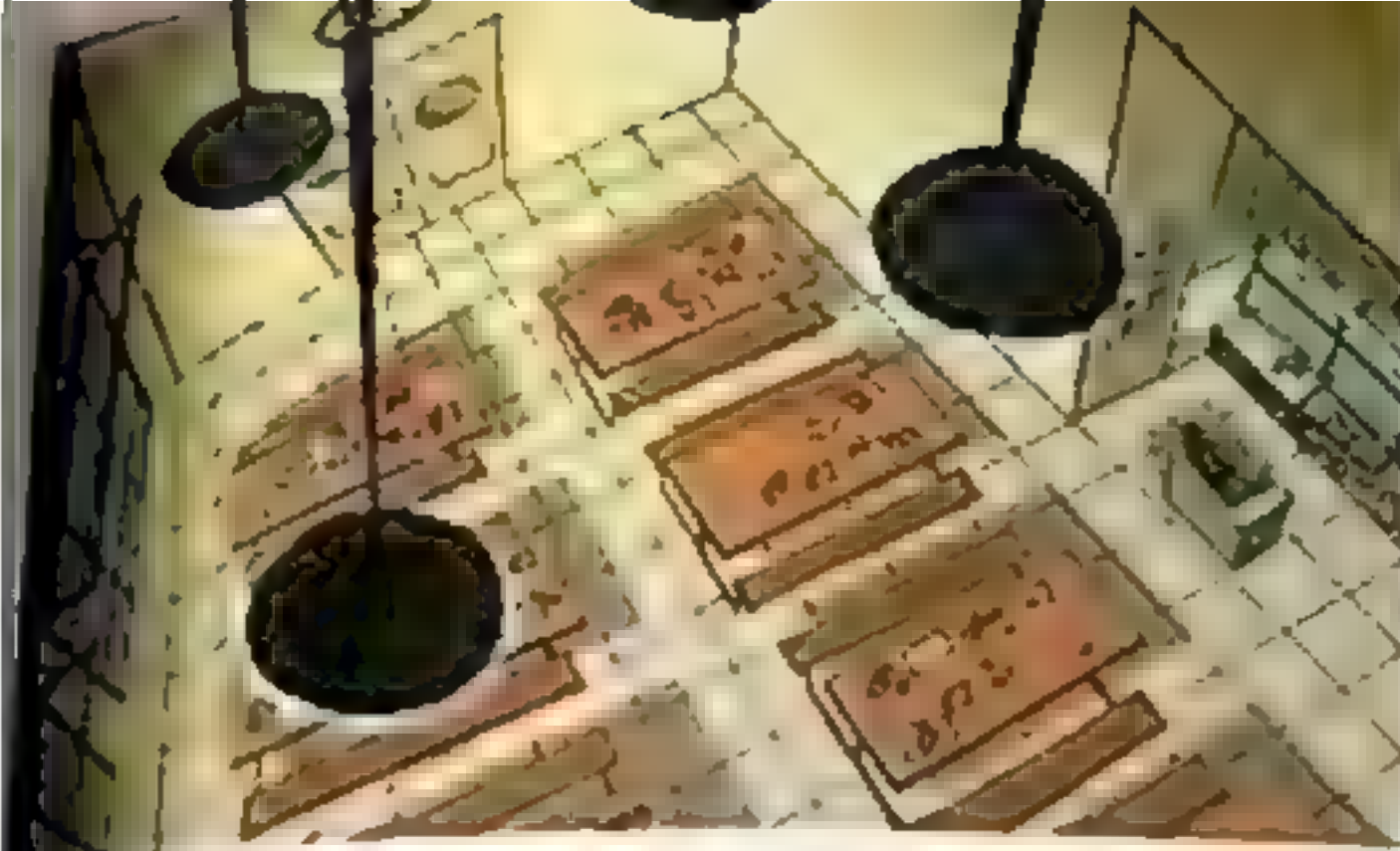
Then, a year later, I'm still at CalArts and I find out that Jhonon has a project going at Nickelodeon. And so I'm thinking, "I'd like to work with this guy." Never had met him. So I sent him an email. This was back in the day when you just throw an email out into the ether and see what happens, and I never hear anything back. Nothing happens.

But then, toward the end of my CalArts career, more than three years into it, I had done this film called *Good Guys Wear Black*. It's about this witch, and she's got a boogeyman in her closet, and it's very much my spooky-cute

**This spread:** Background art from the first Zim pilot episode. The art features the familiar dramatic camera angles found in the series.

The pilot's version of the Skee-Wee-Wee and cartoon music a few layers of fatty decay that are found in the series versions.





And there was a big year-end show at Cal Arts where they show off all the films that the faculty thought were best [the CalArts Character Animation Producers' Show], and Jhonen was there. Another friend of mine had brought him to the show.

Then I got a call a few days later from this friend who says, "Do you want to come into Nick and talk to my friend, who's a creator on the show?" And I said, "Okay,"—I needed a job—and it turned out to be Jhonen. It turned out that he had never read that email. [laughs] He didn't read that email until I had actually been working on the show for a year. He had this backlog of emails. Johnny was riding high at the time, and he was getting a ton of fan mail. So a year later at the studio he was like, "Yeah, I just got an email from you."

Rikki Simons initially met Jhonen through the comics world at APE. After that, they began collaborating, and he helped color one of Jhonen's comics.

**Rikki Simons [colorist, voice of Gir]:** I was living with Jhonen for twenty days helping him color *I Feel Sick*, and he was having a hard time finding a voice for Gir. He started hinting that Gir kind of had some of my qualities. I asked him if he wanted me to audition for it, he said, "I guess you couldn't screw it up more than anyone else." So I got it.

**Jhonen:** Casting was pretty intense. I had known Rikki forever, and Rikki has always had a funny voice. I had gotten sick of the auditions for Gir. There were certain things at the time that were just really miserable: trying to cast robots and lit-

tle girls, like Gaz. There were people who would come in—they were professionals and they had worked in voice acting forever—and there's just these go-to, stock performances. So you would get the robot voice "I AM A ROBOT" [monotone, stilted affectation], and for the girl characters, you would get these cute, plucky voices that were just cloying and horrible that I didn't want. I just wanted people's personalities and not them putting on a show. It was a weird request at the time. Not so much now that we've seen the rise of Adult Swim where the vocal performances are just like, "Guys talking with low energy" [said in a relaxed, conversational tone], which works great.

Rikki didn't sound like anyone else. He wasn't a professional—in any way. [laughs] Completely untrained, perfect for Gir, and there was only a

(Continued on page 40)





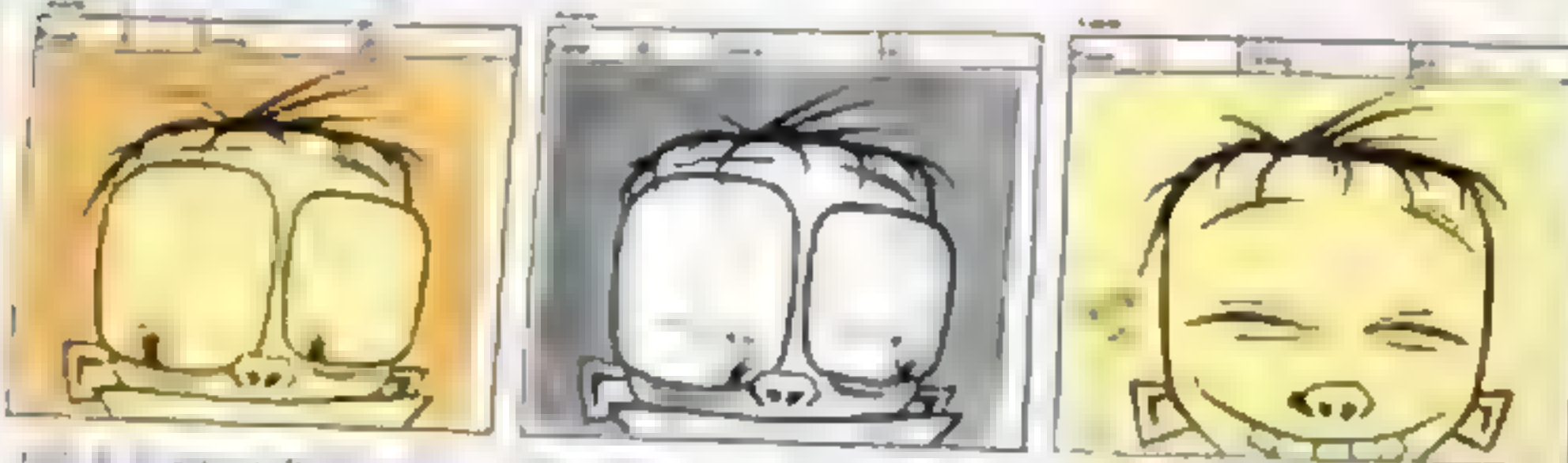
# INVADER ZIM



# INVADER ZIM



# INVADER ZIM



# INVADER ZIM

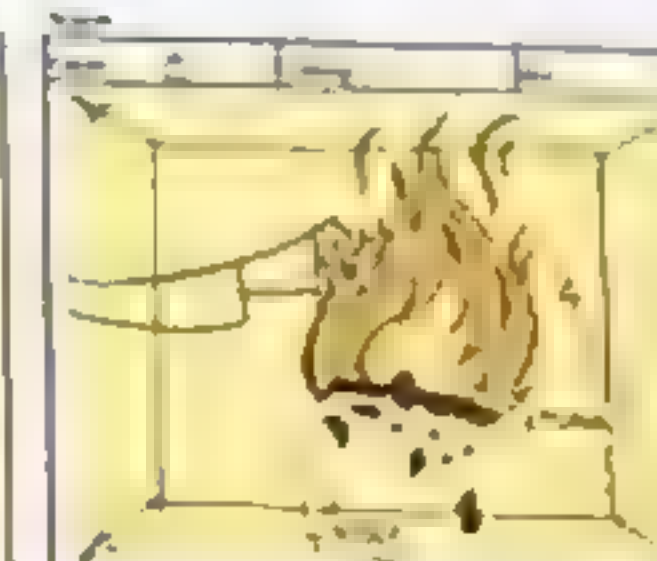
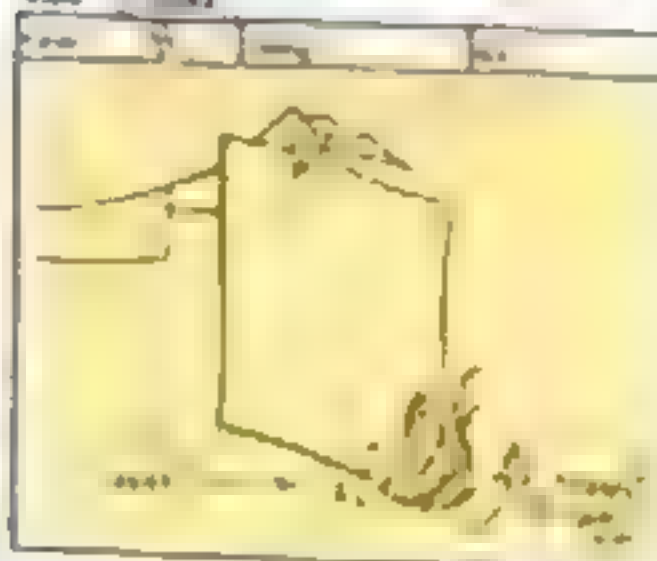


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# INVADER ZIM



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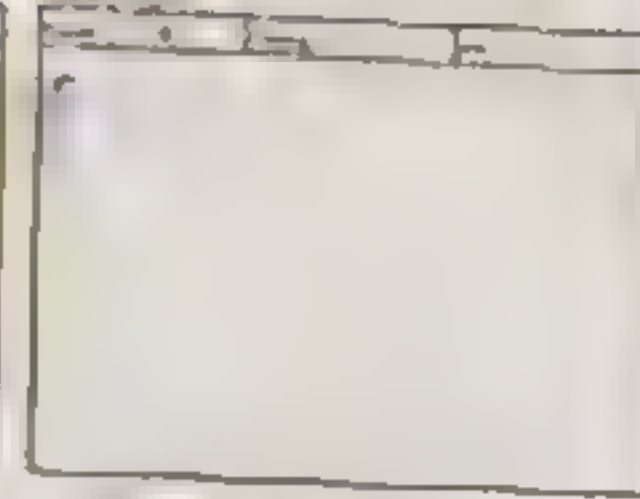




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2. The character is in a dark, industrial setting, possibly a factory or laboratory, looking down at something on the ground.



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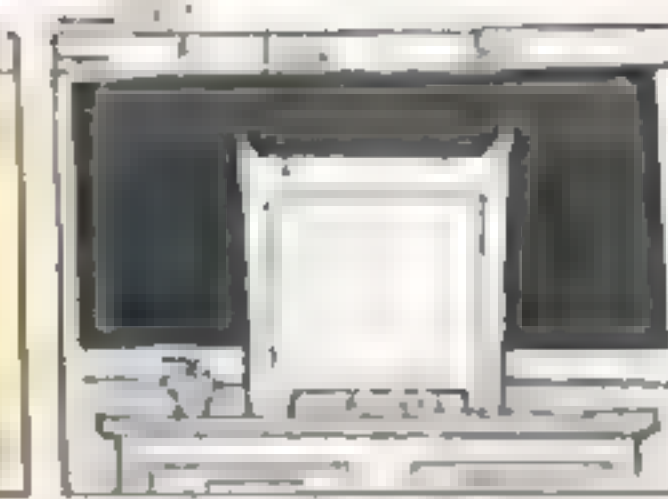
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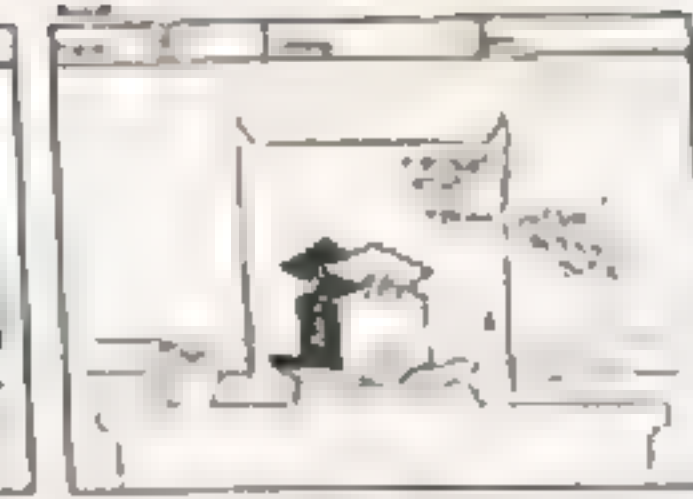
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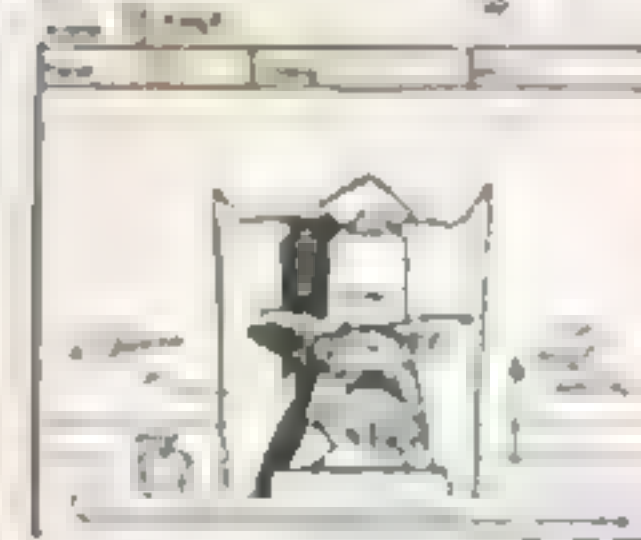
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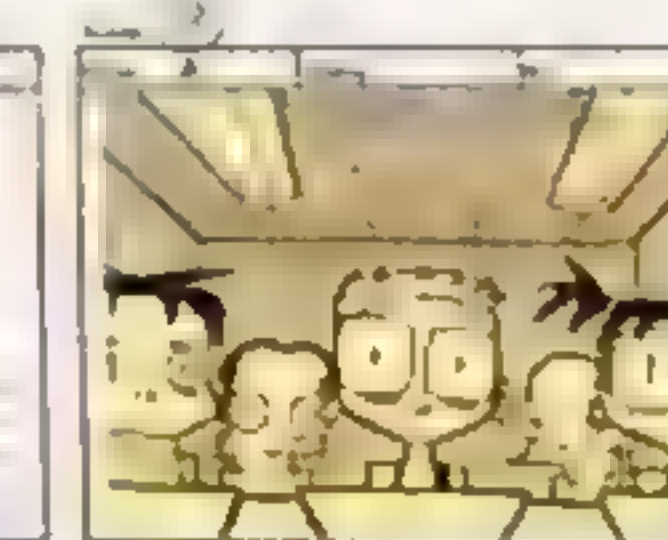
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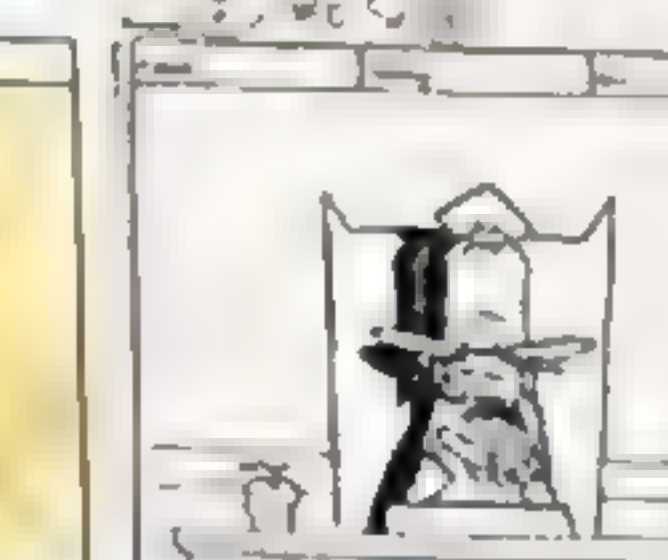
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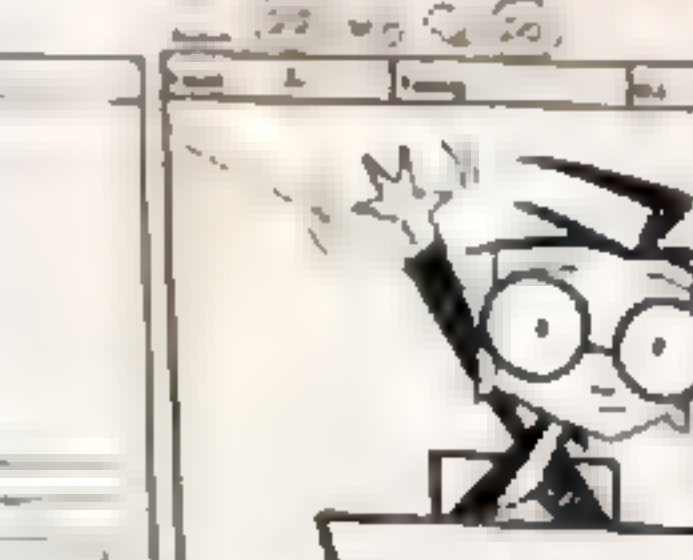
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19. The character is in a dark, industrial setting, possibly a factory or laboratory, looking down at something on the ground.



20. The character is in a dark, industrial setting, possibly a factory or laboratory, looking down at something on the ground.



INVADER ZIM



1. ZIM IN CONTROL ROOM



2. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN

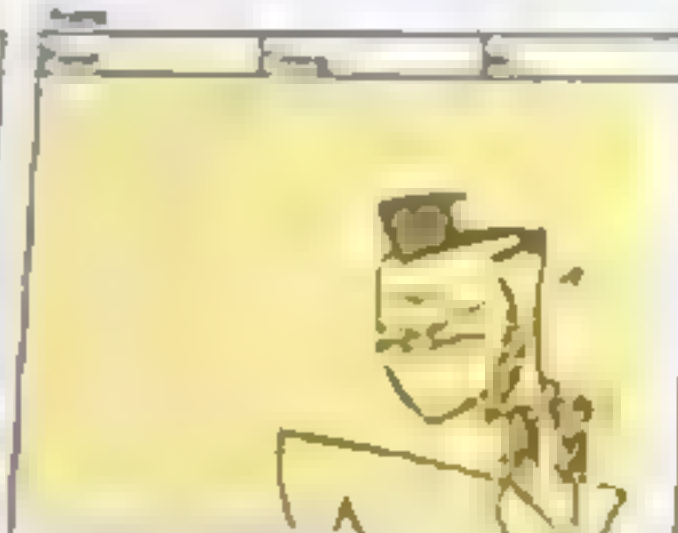


3. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN

INVADER ZIM



4. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN



5. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN



6. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN

INVADER ZIM



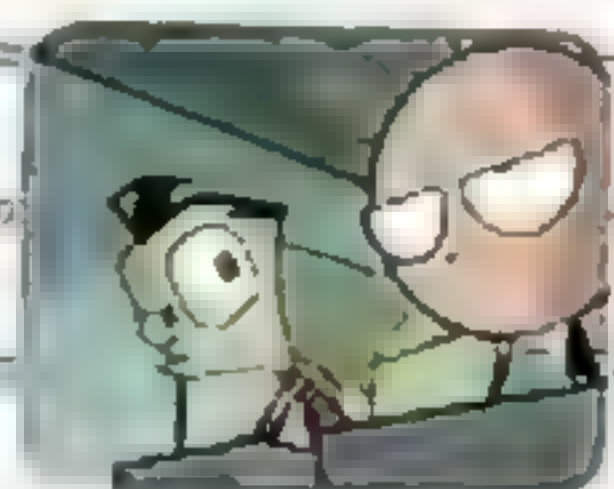
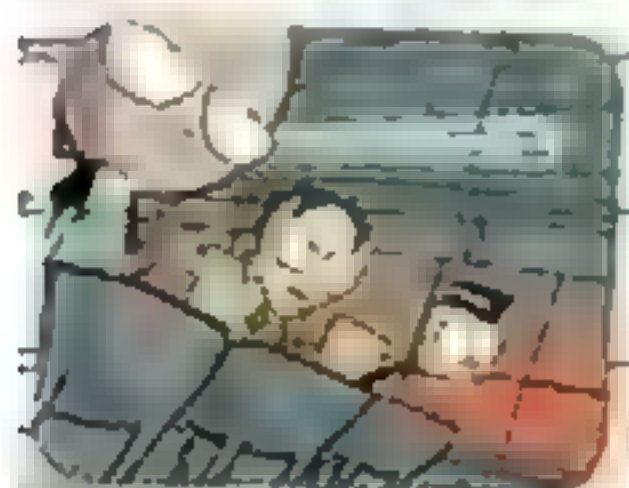
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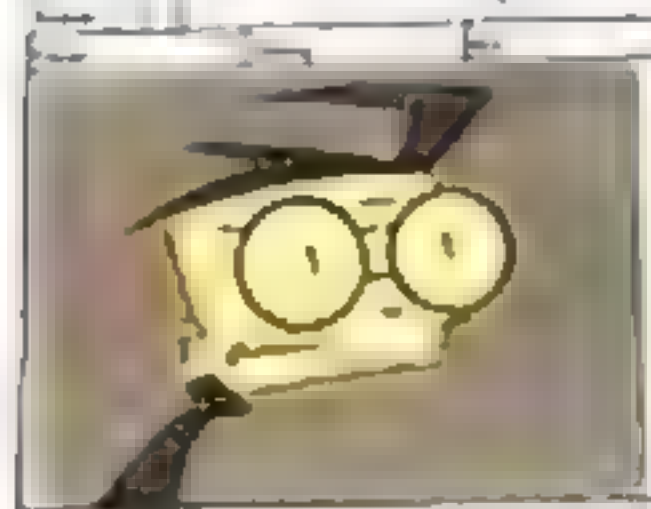
8. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN



9. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN



INVADER ZIM



12. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN



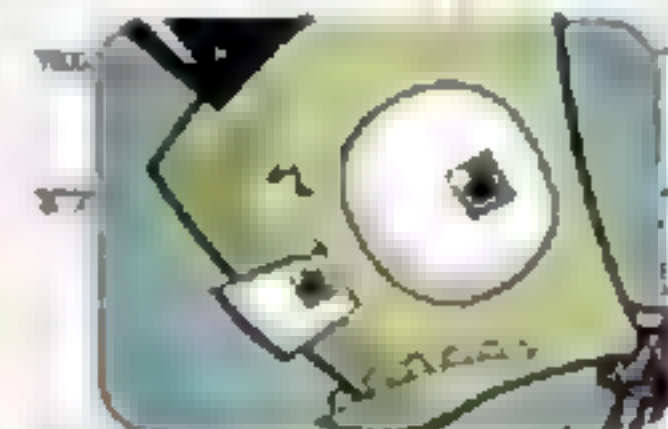
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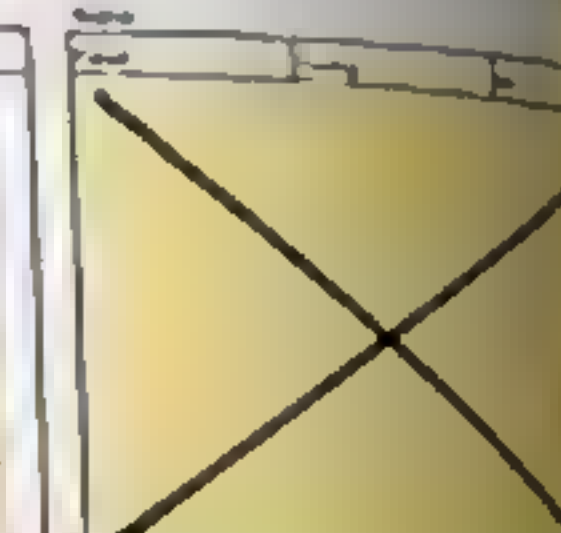
14. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN



16. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN



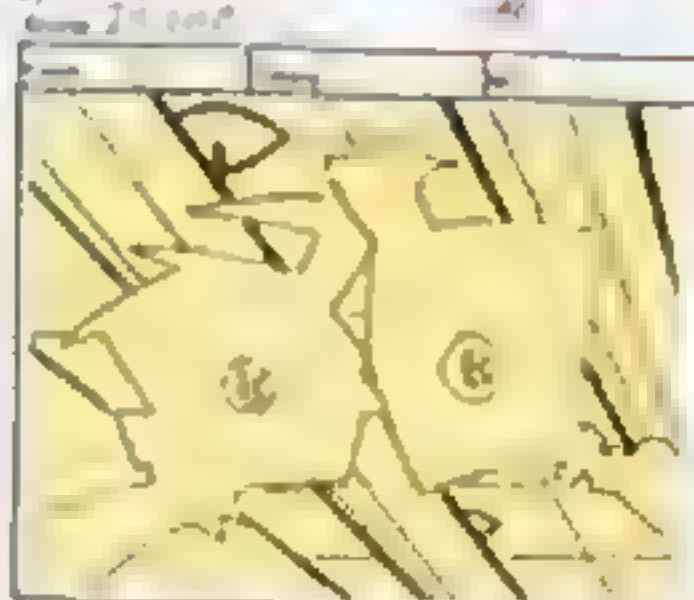
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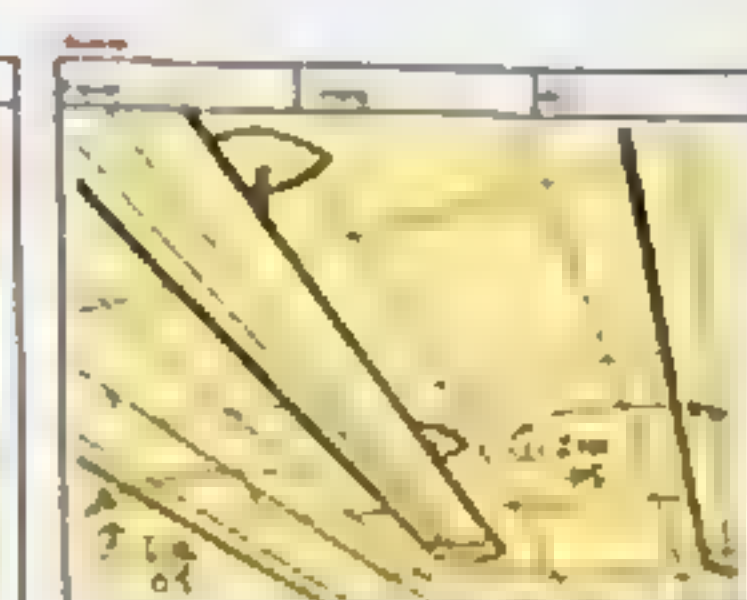
20. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN



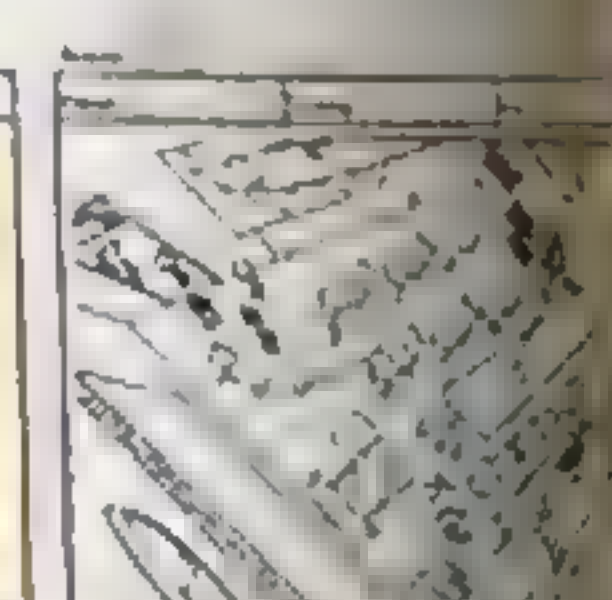
21. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN



22. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN



23. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN

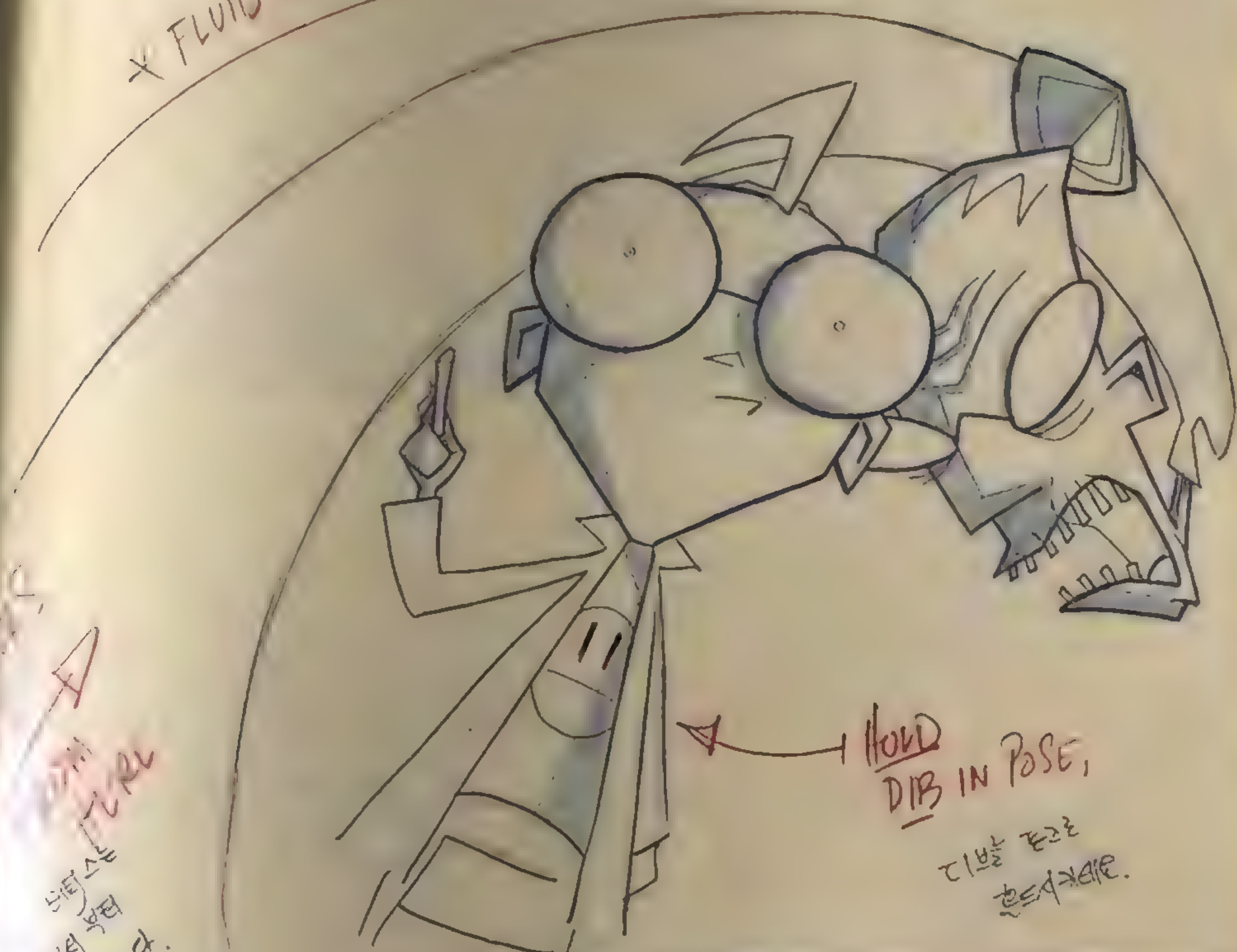


24. ZIM LOOKS AT SCREEN



Handwritten notes in Korean at the top left corner.

FLUID MOVEMENT INTO POSITION



Handwritten notes in Korean on the left side, including the word 'STORYBOARD' and other illegible text.

Previous spread and opposite: A section of the pilot episode's storyboards along with a selection of stills from the episode that sometimes

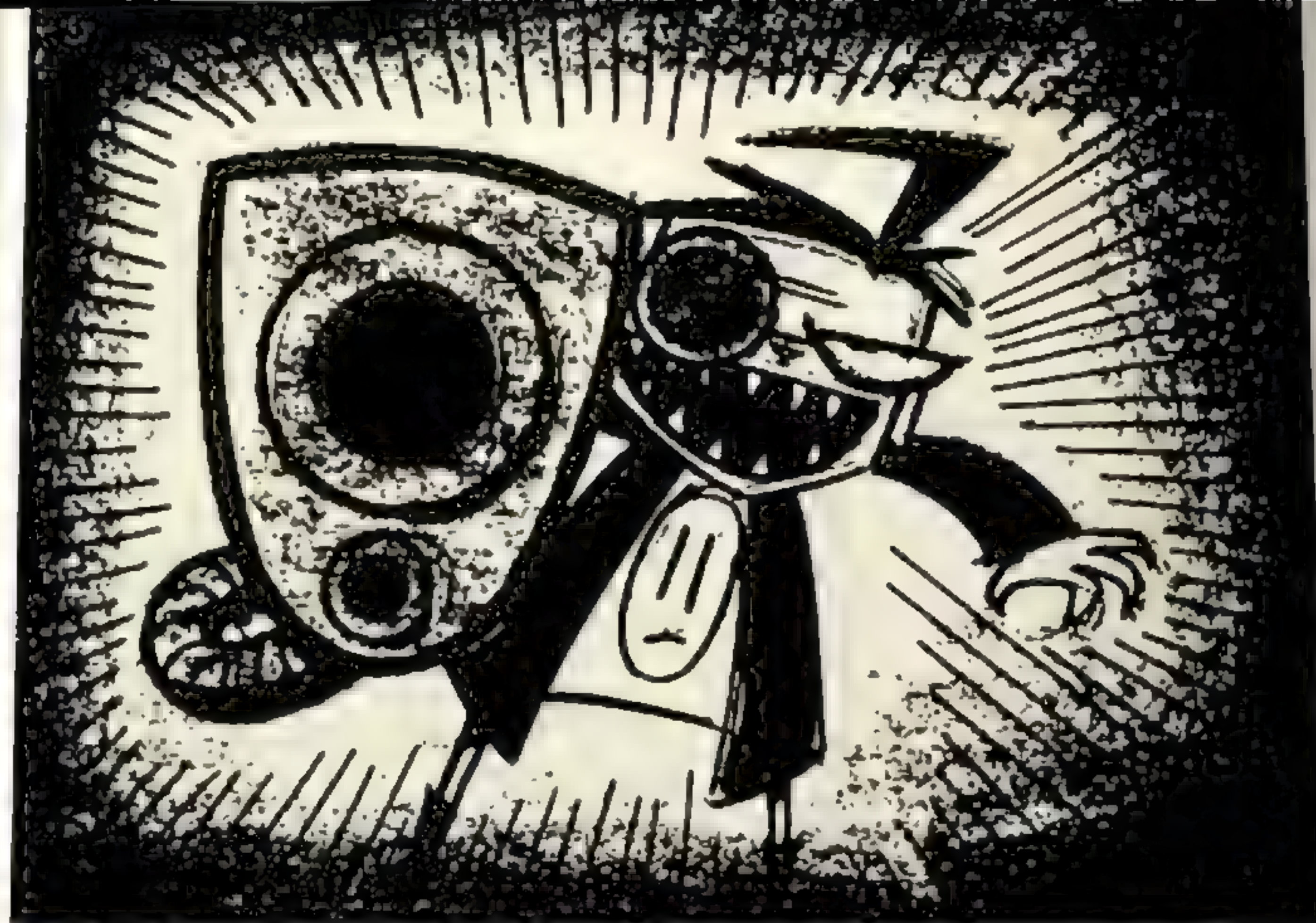
match and sometimes differ from this preliminary visual storytelling tool.

Above: A key animation drawing from the episode with notes on the movement.





-CUTS TRUCK/PANTS OUT? UP TO  
REVEAL THE "REAL" DIBS IN DOCKWAY,



certain amount of directing that you could give him. You could very specifically say, "Okay, now read it more like this," and somewhere between your mouth and his ears, the directions, just who knows what happened to them. He would just do some insane, upsetting thing where you're like, "Why did you... that's not at all like..."—but it was perfect for G! Because his reactions are mystifying! And scary sometimes. Completely inappropriate.

There were reads where it would sound like Rikki was actually hurting himself. That's not training... that's Rikki. That's a person being himself and being perfect for the character.

Finding the voice of Zim was the primary hurdle. Voice actor Billy West had handled Zim's performance in the

pilot, but Jhonon wanted to go in a new direction with his main character for the series.

**Jhonon:** For the *Zim* series casting, Billy was one of the people who did a pass at Zim. The thing about Billy—he did *Ren and Stimpy*, he's Fry on *Futurama*, so he was already really well established. Mark Hamill also took a stab at it, and you know, he was voicing the Joker. These were all people who I thought were great, but they weren't my first choice, not because I didn't like them, but they were more the network's idea. They wanted to go very established, a safer bet. I just wanted someone who would always be associated with *Invader Zim*. Even though Richard [voice actor Richard Steven Horvitz] had done *Angry Beavers*, I felt that we could get something out of him that was going to be a lot more recognizable as Zim.

I remember Richard being the hardest one to get on to the series because casting thought his audition was still too close to the character that he played on *Angry Beavers*, Daggat. I kept at it, and eventually I won out on that. Everyone else eventually realized, "Why are we fighting? This is great." I know this was the guy. He's perfect.

Richard would just go for it. He's incredible to play around with. You know, you need people to completely forget the concept of dignity. You need people who can just play, the way that they did when they were little kids. Having Richard around always reminds me of why this all is fun. It's great to have partners in crime. People who get it. You're just a couple of people goofing around, and it's not work! It's kind of amazing.

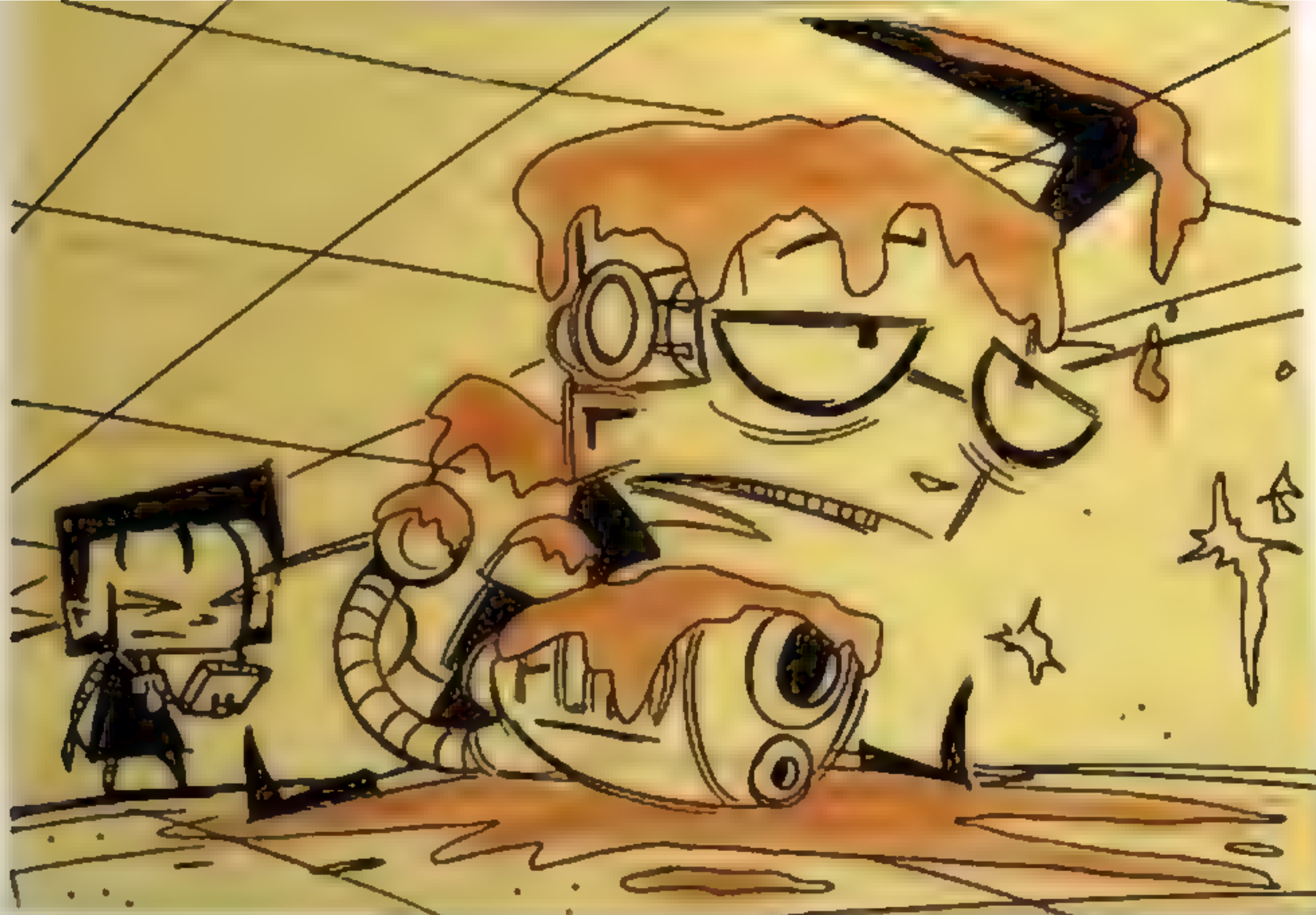
The crew at large that came together was young and hungry for some creative muscle-flexing. It was an





...and many of whom went on to major entertainment world achievements, notably Bryan Konietzko, who would go on to create Nickelodeon shows *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *The Legend of Korra*.

**Bryan Konietzko [storyboard artist, art director]:** It was still early in my career, and I was coming off a couple prime-time animated series, which were creatively stirring environments. In those types of productions, a room full of writers/producers on the other side of town dictated everything. The art and animation crews were just expected to follow orders. As a result, I often didn't feel much of an artist, or like I could get more than one or two of my own visual ideas into an episode. Then I did the *Zim* production, and it was the complete opposite.



Many of the cartoons of the 1980s were essentially commercials, written and produced by teams that needed tight control over how their toy-based characters and brands were depicted. Among some Hollywood animation crews who had to work in this uninspiring environment, the animation writer and his scripts became the boogeyman, a symbol of this creative repression from above—from parties who didn't understand and/or didn't respect the medium and its potential. *Zim*, though scripted before being storyboarded, was an example of a scripted show that allowed the leeway for storyboard artists to contribute creatively.

**Jhonen:** I don't know how much we deviated from how things were typically done because *Zim* was still very heavily script-driven. Writing was the first chance for me to have fun. I loved the

early days of being able to just write whatever I wanted, not really caring if it was acceptable or not.

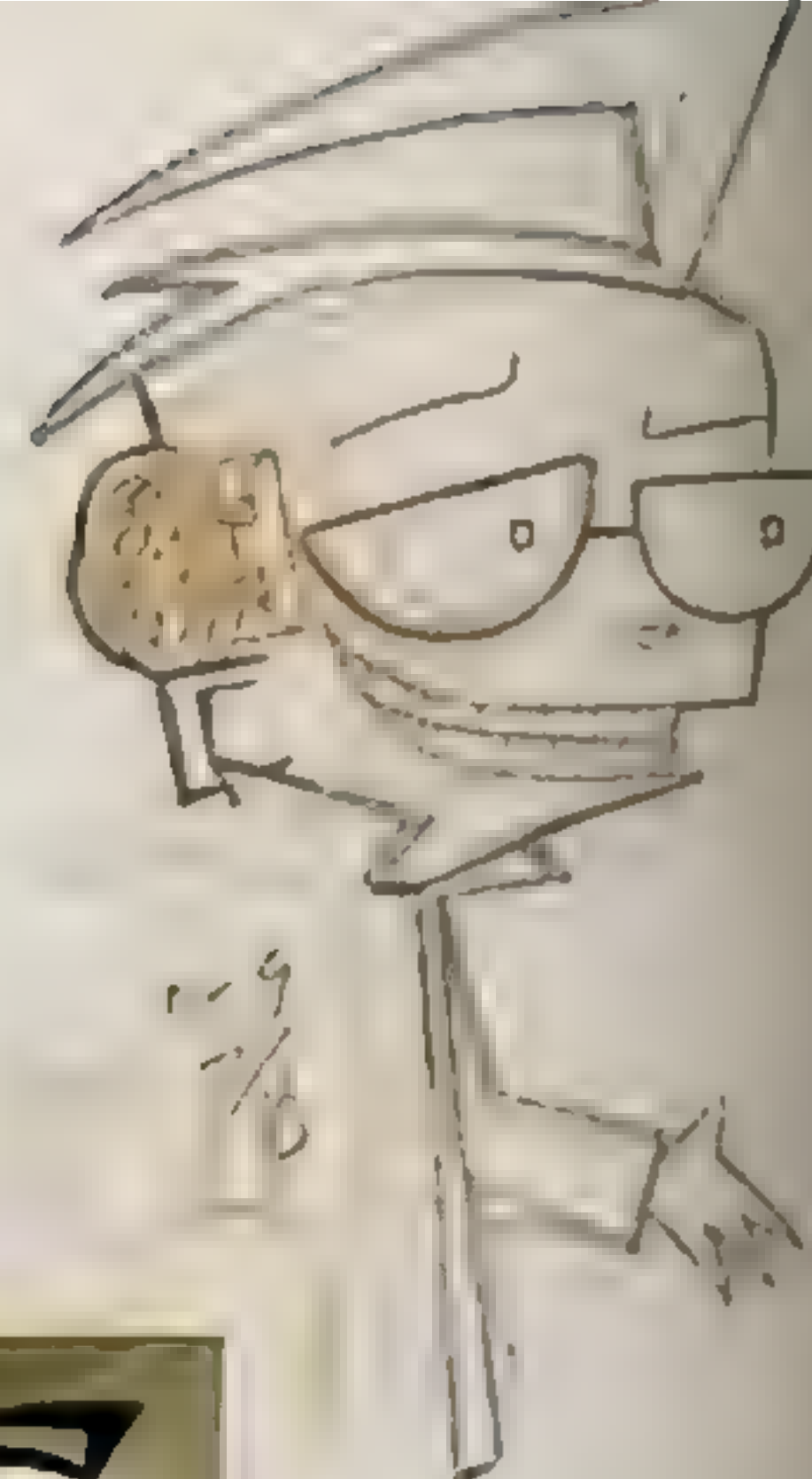
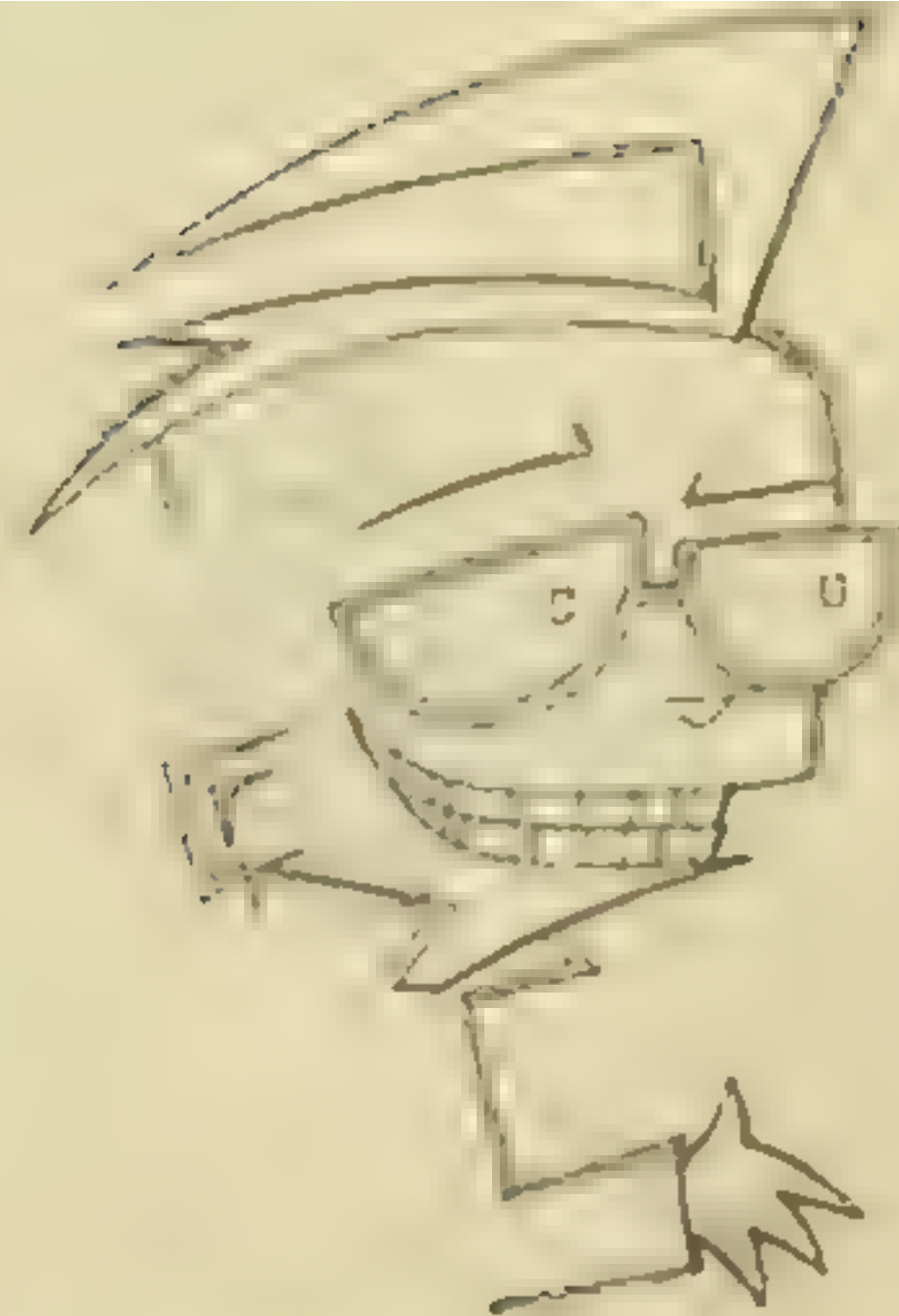
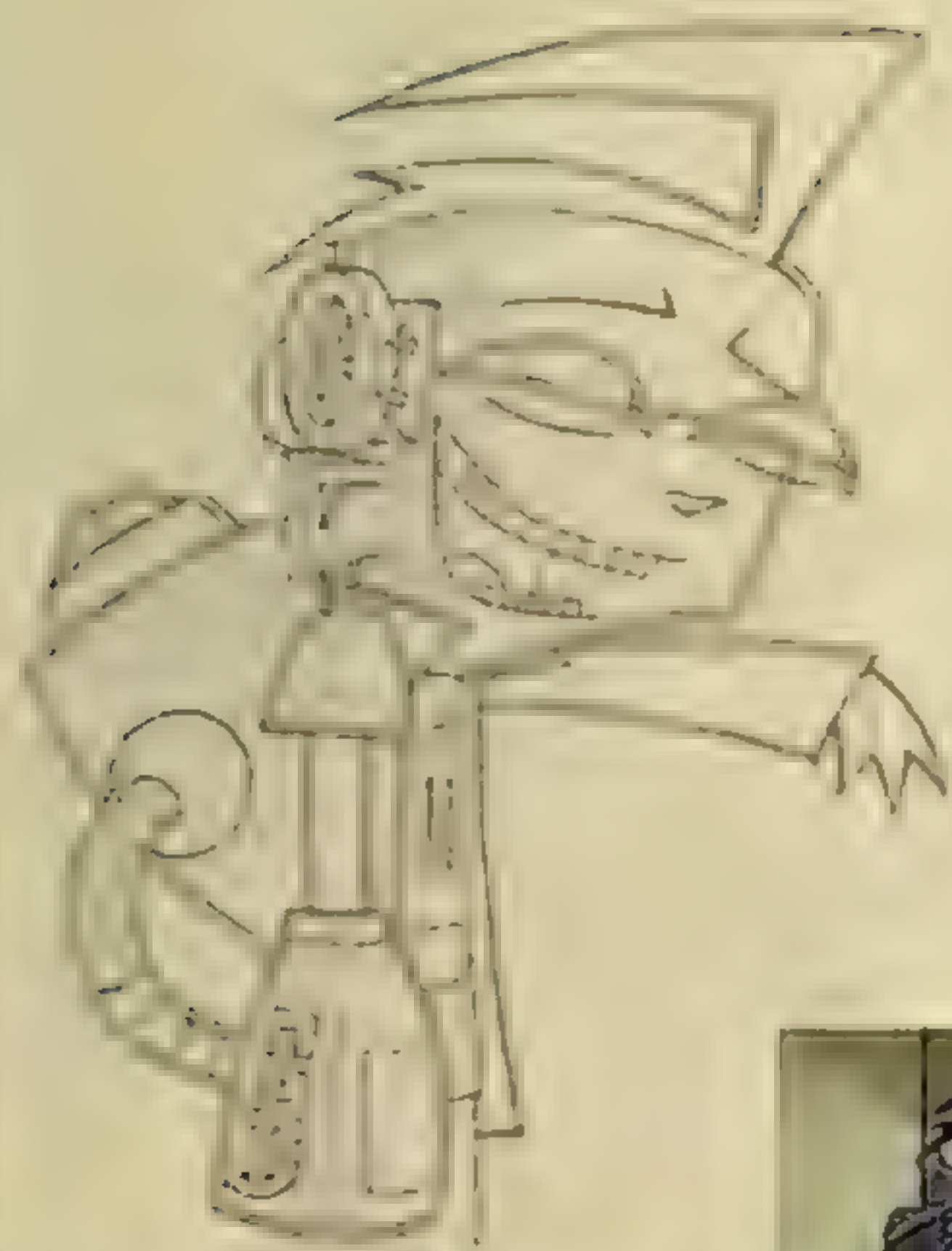
Bringing in the board artists was the second opportunity to have fun, and letting the board artist know that they should just try stuff. Letting them know that they could just do whatever they wanted. Then they would push things further and there was a lot of room to interpret the jokes at that point.

Jhonen's managerial approach proved that it was not so much the fact that a show was scripted or not that determined whether a crew felt valued and inspired to contribute their best work.

**Bryan:** Before I was art directing on *Zim*, I was drawing storyboards, and in that department we were

This spread: Selected drawings from the pilot episode storyboard featuring Dib.





encouraged to run wild. We were all trying to take advantage of a rare opportunity, generating the most over-the-top action scenes and absurdist humor we could cram into eleven-minute chunks. A legendary example was Kyle Menke turning one sentence in a script—I think it simply read, “And then there is a chase.”—into two hundred storyboard pages. No one else could draw as fast as Kyle, especially not me, so most of us other storyboard artists were working very long hours—not because anyone was forcing us to, but because it was so inspiring to have so much creative liberty.

Perhaps because of their youthful bravado—or their fashion-forward clothes, their late-night gaming sessions, or the matte-black spray-painted ornaments on their crew Christmas tree—the group earned a reputation over in their corner of the studio floor. Their

nearest adjacent studio-mates were, after all, the crew of *Dora the Explorer*.

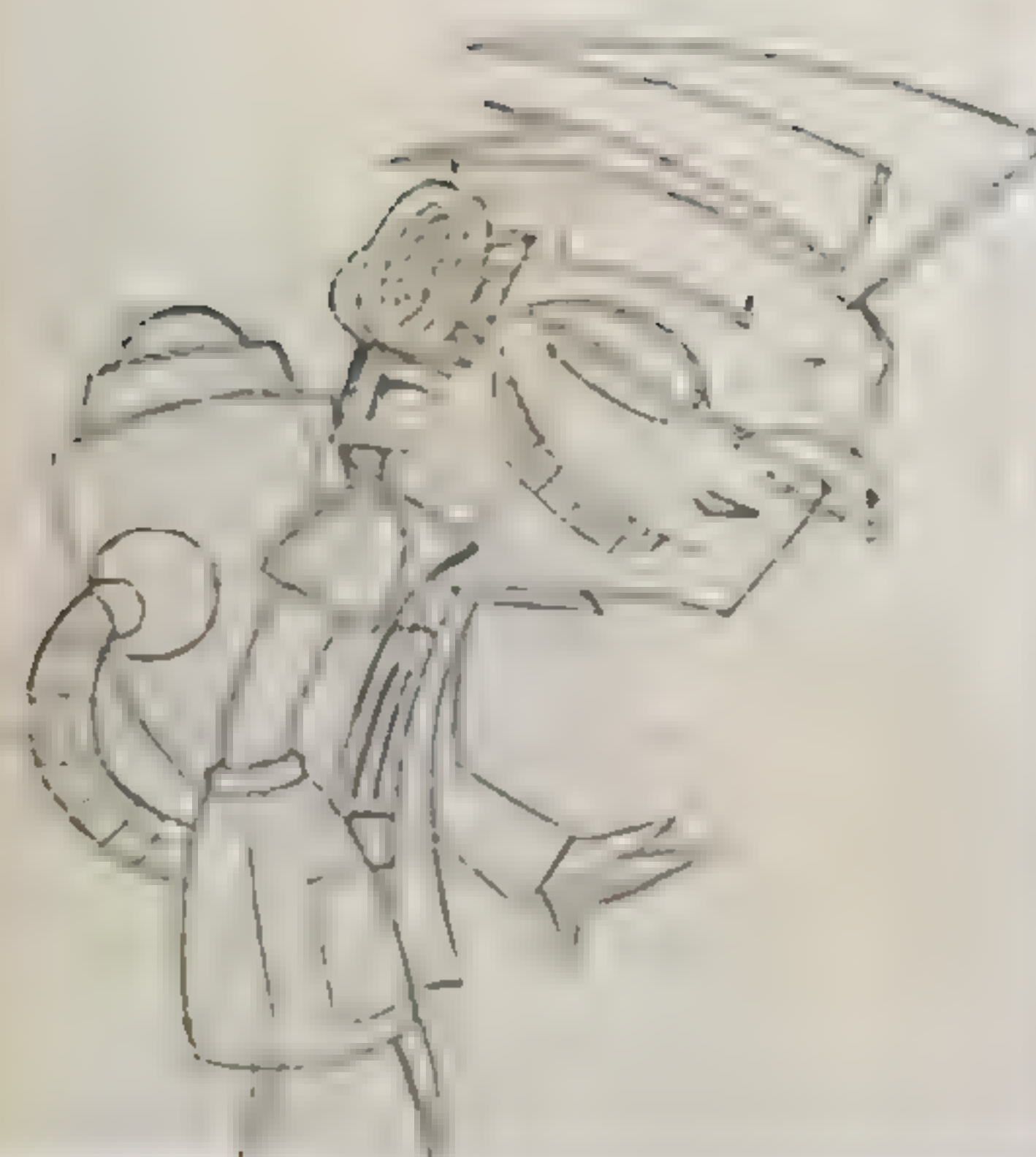
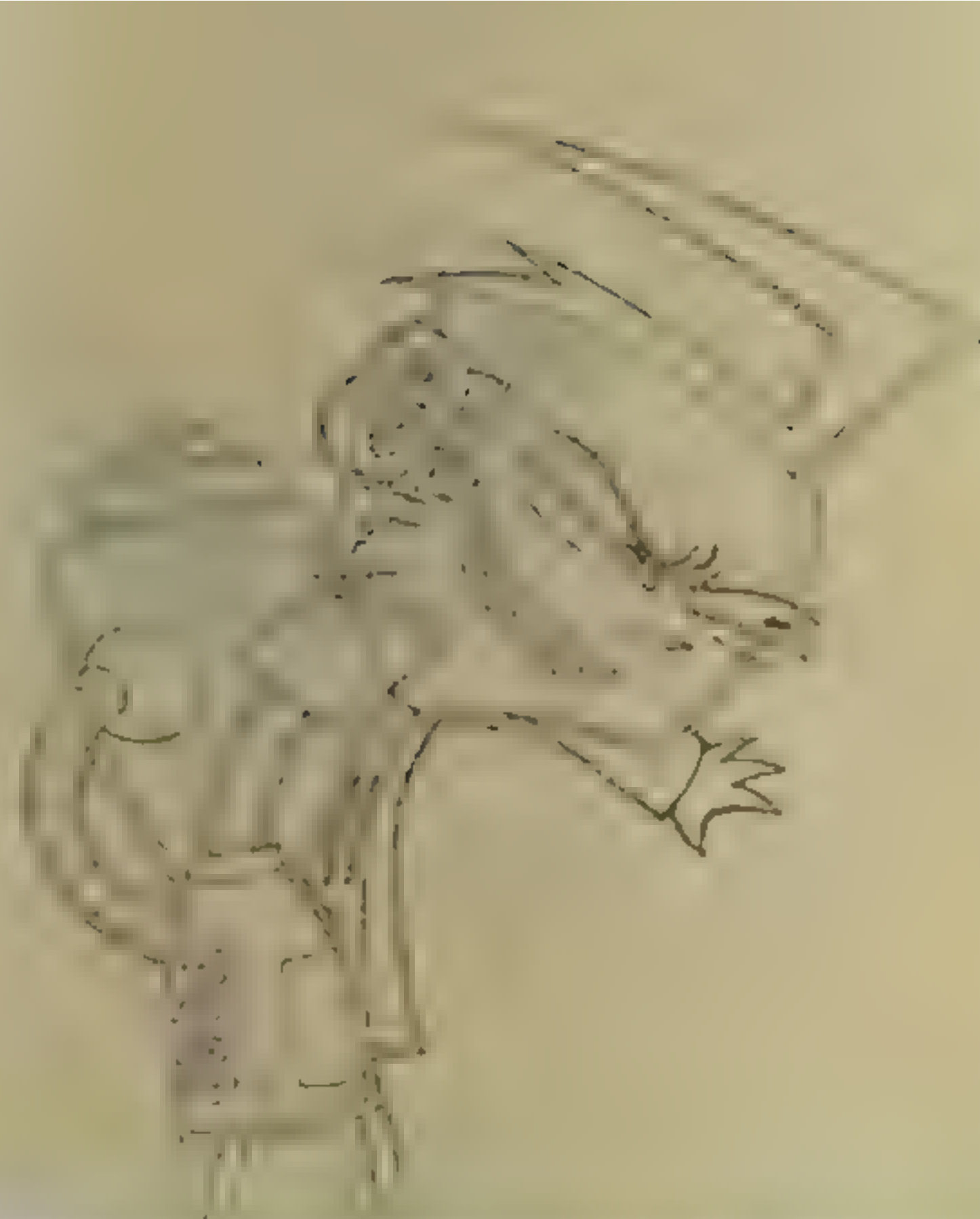
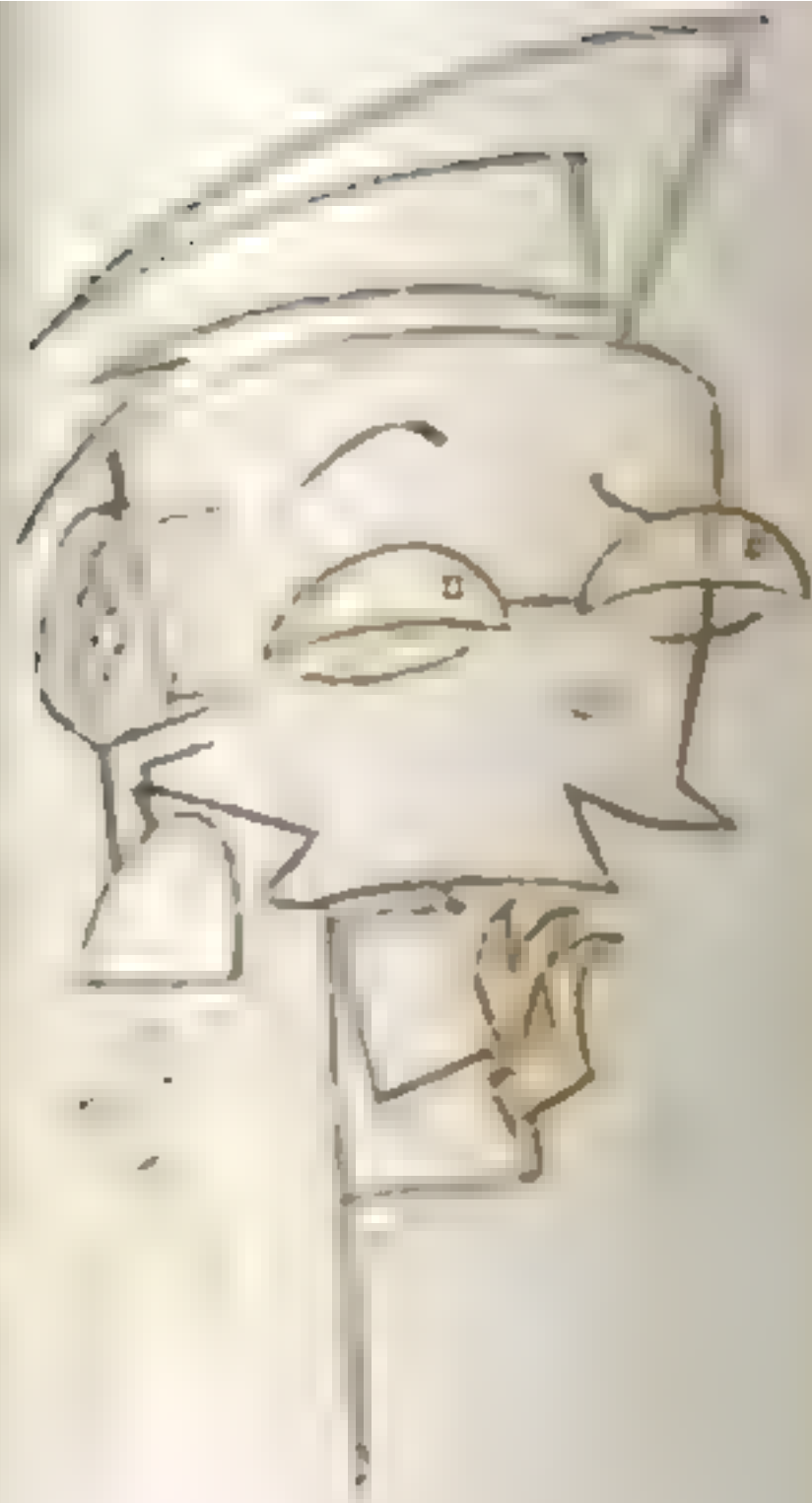
**Jhonon:** We never really had much interaction with the other productions. When we finished our first twenty-two-minute episode, there was a screening of all the stuff that had just been completed at the studio. And *Dora* was one of them, and there was another show called *Oswald*, and those were both Nick Jr. shows. And all three crews were gathered in what was kind of just a big gym here at the studio. They showed *Dora the Explorer*, and it was adorable. They showed *Oswald*, and it was super cute. These were people that were laughing and giggling at *Dora* and *Oswald*, and then they showed *Zim*, this horrible, screaming green thing. You could feel the crowd just kind of recognizing that something was wrong. [laughs] But we thought it was hilarious.

The *Zim* crew was happy to fill the role of the local studio rebels (or oddities) by virtue of producing work with such relative creative leeway.

**Louie del Carmen [storyboard supervisor]:** Everyone took ownership of the show and brought a little piece of what it was that was inspiring them at that time. Anime was big, video games were big, science fiction was big, and at the time all this new media was burgeoning—there was excitement that all this cool stuff was going to be at your fingertips. I think everybody had a chip on their shoulder. They wanted to make a cool show that was different, that was going to knock people's socks off.

Since the earliest days of television animation, frugality has been a priority. Generally, both the budget and





schedule imposed on animated productions are the primary factors that limit the amount of knocking off that the typical crew can achieve. Any extra enhancement that can be squeezed out of the schedule usually is the result of crew members working their tails off—perhaps more than is reasonable. This was the case on *Zim*.

**Jhonen:** To get the cinematic look that we wanted for *Zim* required a lot more work than getting a typical made-for-TV look, which would have been a flatter, sitcom, Sunday funnies—type approach. If I got my way, every other line of dialogue would have its own shot and angle to emphasize that moment, and that stuff really adds to the work. Each new shot needs a background, the background has to look

good, the characters have to be drawn correctly, and so on.

Each *Zim* episode began its life in the Burbank studio, but the production process included outsourcing the actual drawing of character animation to a studio on the other side of the globe. What took place in the states was considered preproduction (the writing, character, and background design; storyboarding; music; and voice-acting), and postproduction (final editing and sound mixing). This is still typical today for many U.S. television animation productions, whose work is completed in South Korea, Canada, or anywhere with a favorable cost of doing business.

For its largely green crew, *Zim* was also a training ground in this international production process.

**Bryan:** Working on *Zim* was brutal. But it was also, more importantly, the most creative thing I had ever been a part of up to that point, and it trained and prepared me in ways that fed directly into subsequently cocreating and showrunning my own series.

One of the opportunities it afforded me was a three-week trip to Seoul, South Korea, when I was twenty-four years old, to train the animation crews in drawing Jhonen's style. It was an awesome experience to work with the artists there and learn more about the overseas production pipeline—something I had wondered about a lot since starting in TV animation. I did my best to understand the challenges they faced, and to see what we could do stateside to help them make better, more on-model animation on a tight TV schedule. After the trip, I compiled a huge binder of overlays I drew on top of their



**This spread:** Animation drawings and clean-up pencil drawings from the pilot episode which illustrate how the signature thick line around the

characters was achieved. When drawn at the scale, artists needed to draw a double pencil line for the thick outlines, which would be inked in solid black.

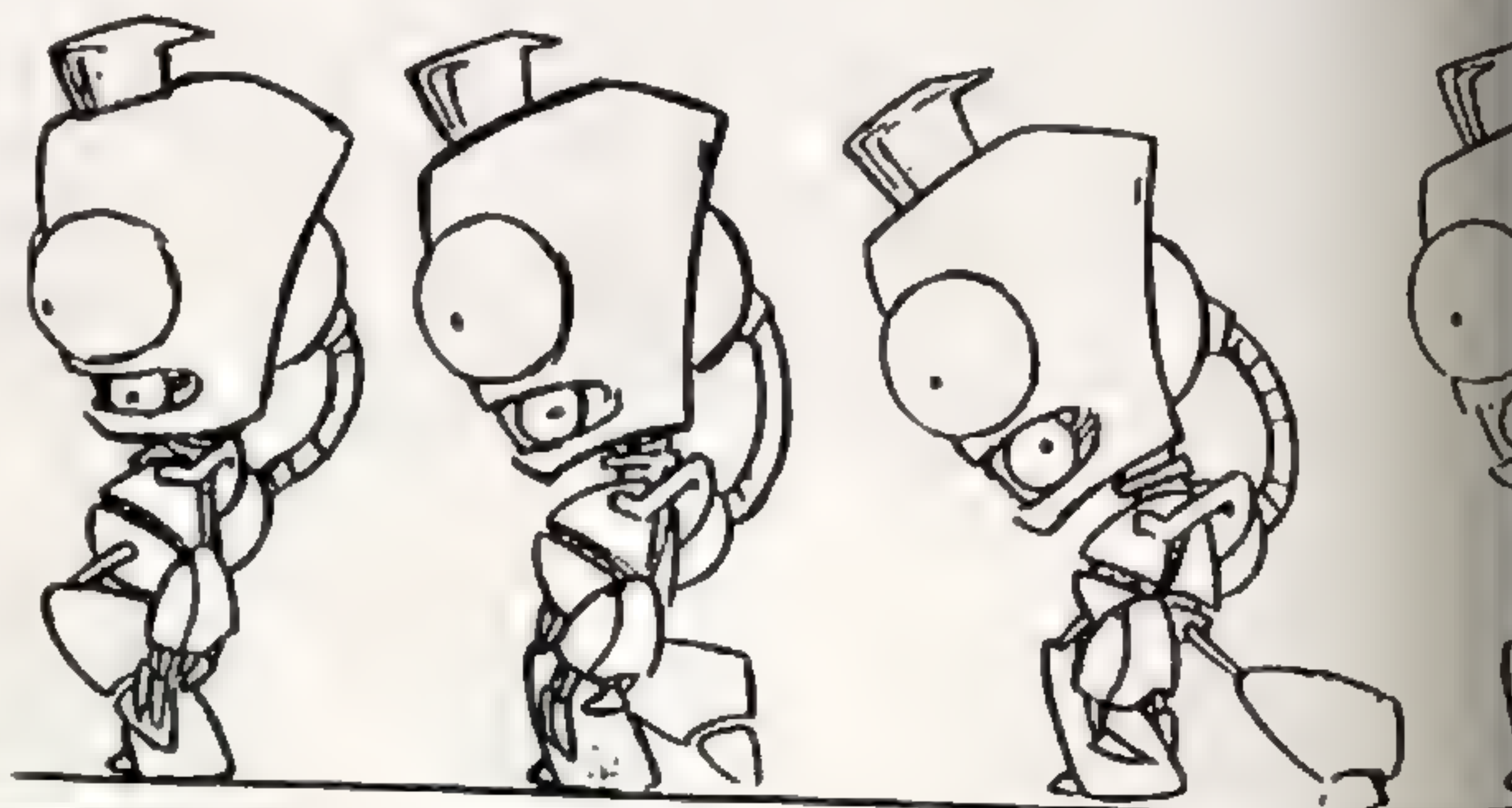
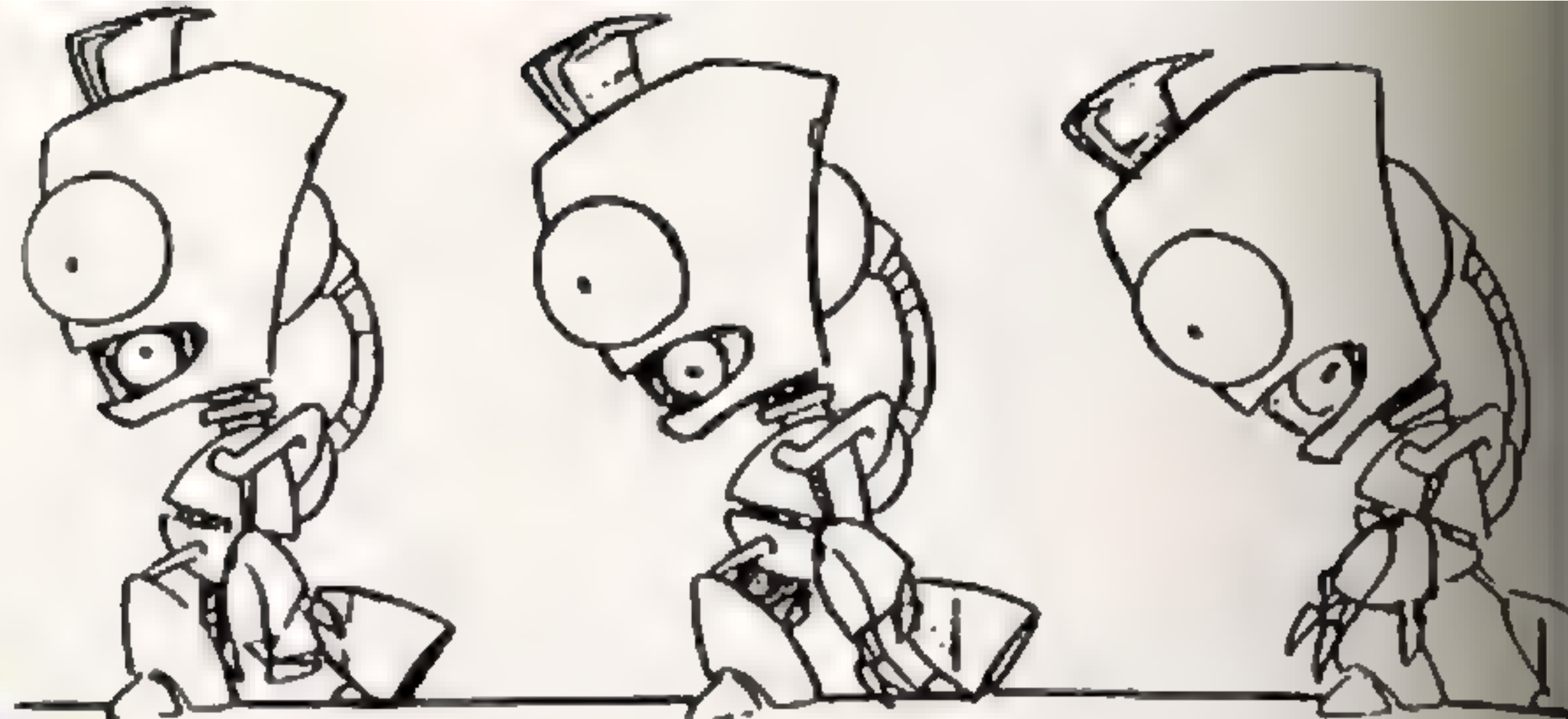




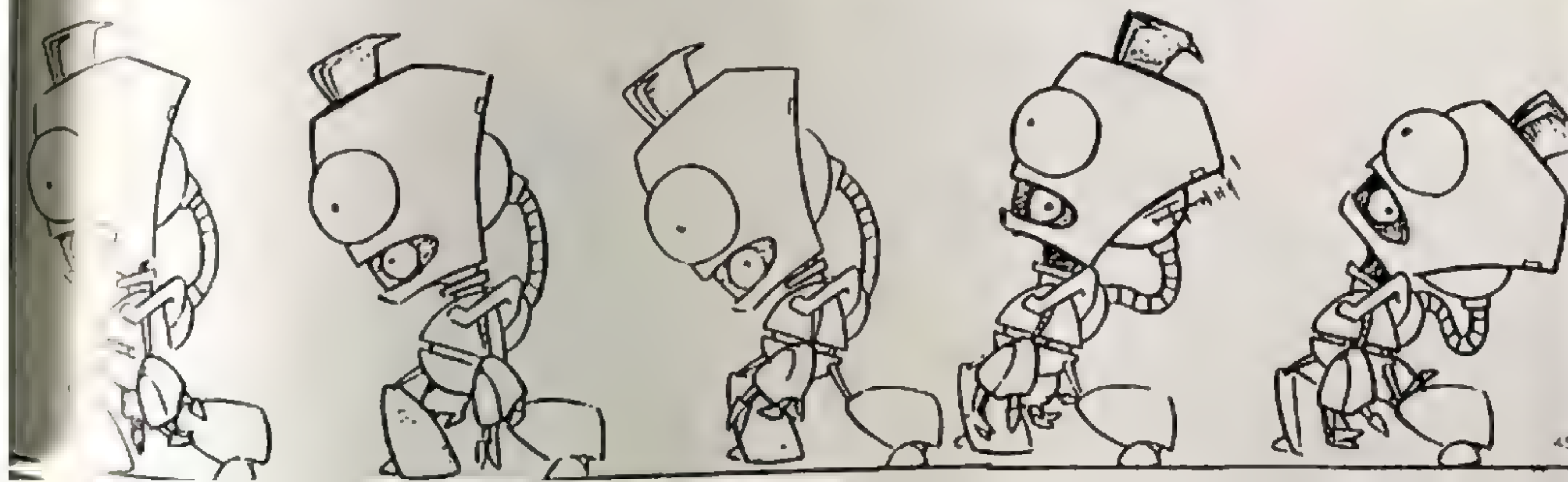
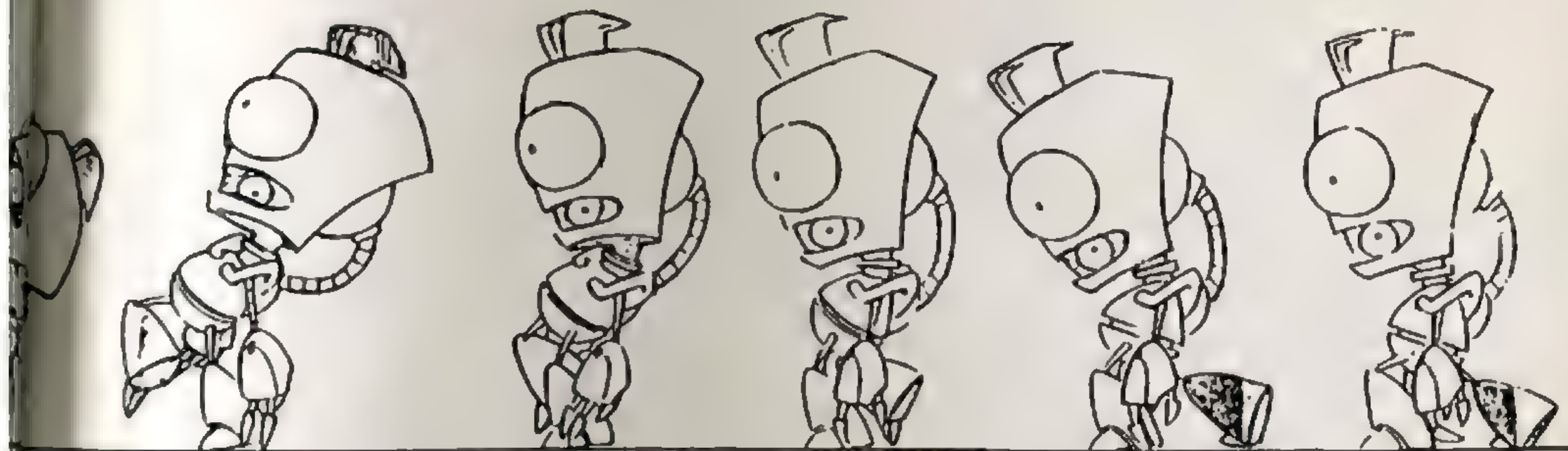
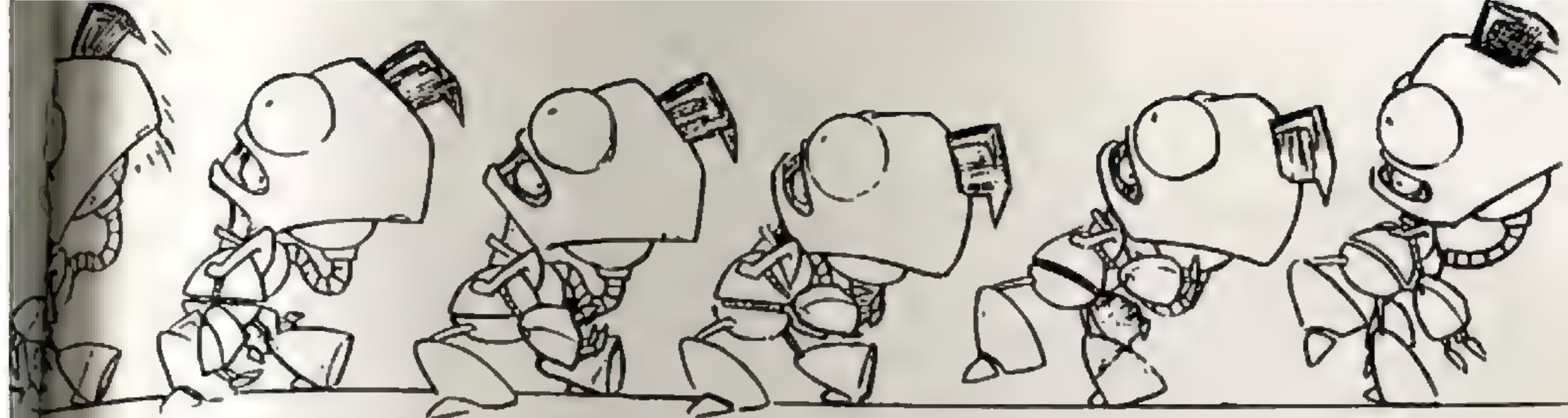
layouts, which ended up serving as a sort of style guide. Later, I took everything I learned from that trip and applied it to how we set up the production on *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, particularly in how we collaborated with the South Korean animators. I don't know that I could have asked for a better animation boot camp than the *Zim* production, even if working on it took a couple years off my life!

A whirlwind production with late nights and intense workloads—often self-imposed and self-inflicted through exuberant creative choices—*Zim* was a novel, formative experience. The kind of thing that leaves a mark.

This spread: An animation walk cycle from the series pilot featuring Zim in his robotic armor.









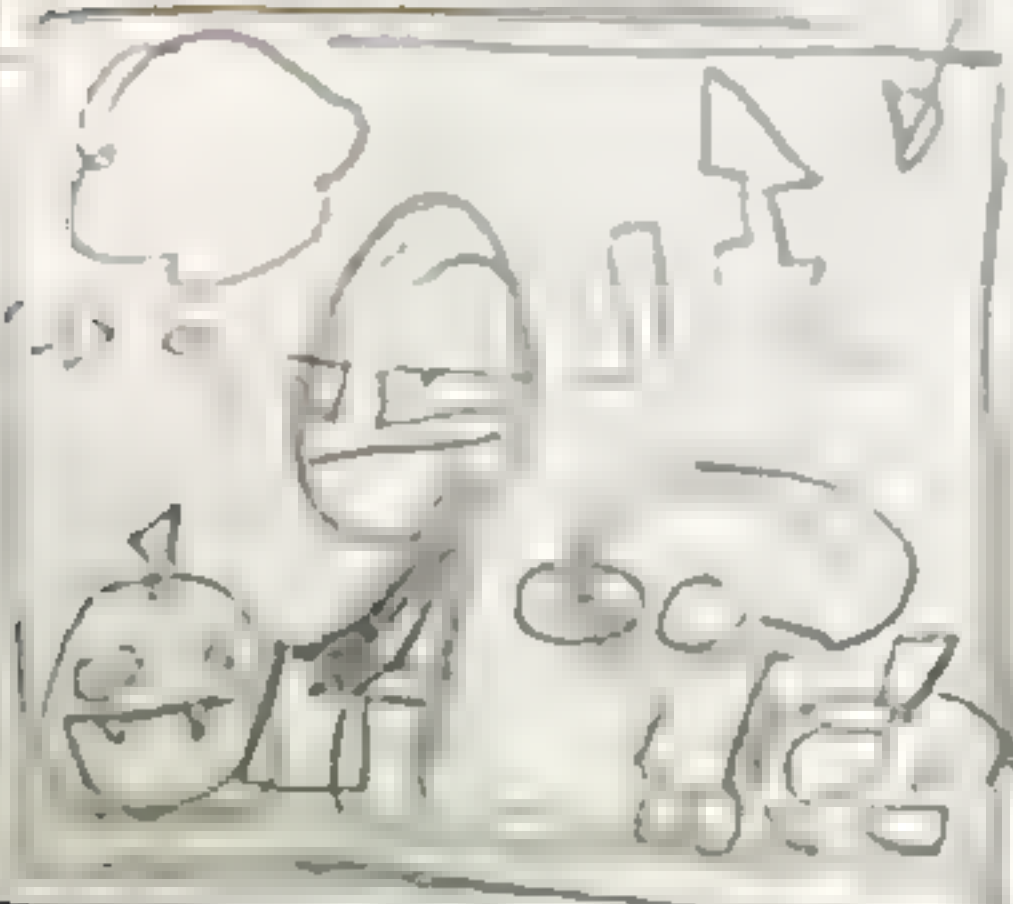


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## 2: ZIM, THE INVADER EARTH DESERVES

### WRITING AND DESIGNING THE CHARACTERS OF ZIM

Earth is a world filled to the brink with madness—especially for children. When not locked up at the Crazy House for Boys, children attend Skool, where they are subject to Poop Cola-sponsored educational films, desks made of trash (due to budget cuts), and organ harvesting from their resident space alien. Zim's presence makes so little of a splash in this dystopian hellscape, it's as if he has fulfilled a role that was waiting for him. The herd needed to be thinned. Earth had been awaiting an overconfident invader from Irk.

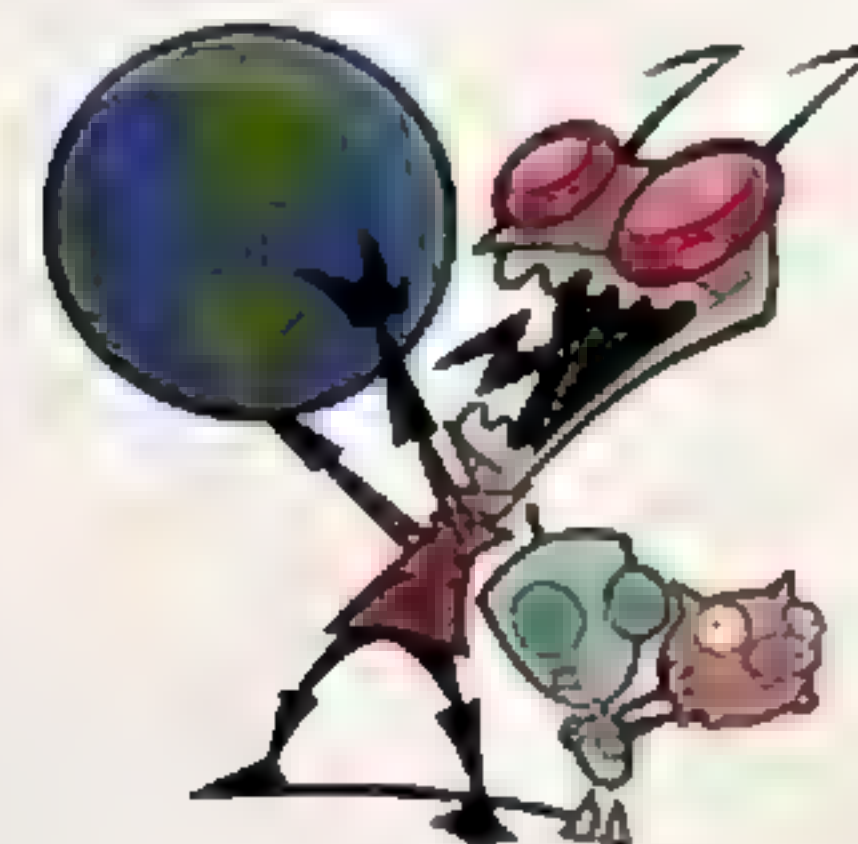
#### Molding Characters

Character personalities, the relationships among them, and their visual designs are each important parts of the *Zim* whole.

The *Zim* cast is designed with thick, inky black line art—thicker than the average animated cartoon. Accentuating the line pushes the design of the characters

toward a graphic flatness, though they are constructed with dimensional forms underneath. The dark and drab color schemes, punctuated by olive, fuchsia, and bloody reds, make a statement about the mood: darkness and unease lie ahead. The style source is clearly Jhonen's artwork, but the system and guides created to synchronize the preproduction team in Burbank and the animation production studio in Seoul, South Korea, is an effort developed by many artists.

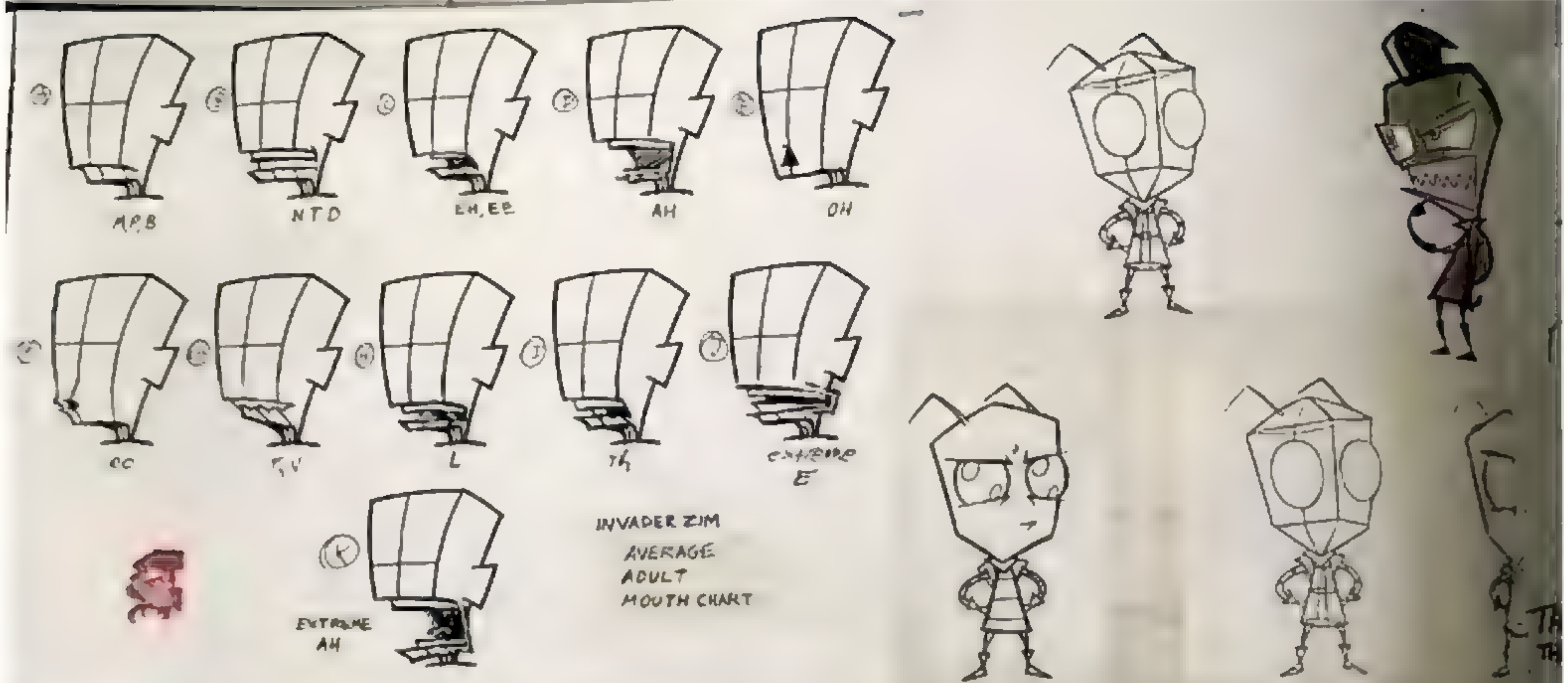
**Aaron Alexovich (character designer):** A lot of the line treatments we had in *Zim* were influenced by comics: that heavy outline with a lot of little noodly details within. We didn't keep things simple, that's for sure. Jhonen wasn't conforming his style to the constraints of animation, which was difficult for some people but also led to some visual inventiveness, in trying to solve this puzzle that he was insisting that we solve.



This spread: Jhonen's designs for promotional artwork for the episode "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14), and stills from the opening

moments of the episode where Zim realizes his deadly fear of costumed children





**Jhonen Vasquez (series creator):** I don't know if that's part of the answer to breaking through the usual tedium—just to bring in more people who don't know what they're doing, [laughs] because that can go horribly wrong. But yeah, I didn't come from animation. I didn't come in knowing what works, what doesn't work, what people like. I was blessed with a certain element of Zim's own obliviousness. [laughs] That's where a lot of the character comes from, being kind of aware how beneficial it is to not know anything.

At the time I was developing *Zim*, I was really unhappy with the visual school in animation where things were all sort of looking the same. You get that every couple of years; there's a look that takes over, and at the time it was this retro UPA look. [The United Productions of America studio, active from the 1940s through the 1970s, was an

innovator in stylish limited theatrical and television animation with a modern design flair.] It was *Dexter's Lab*, it was *Powerpuff Girls*, it was *Fairly OddParents*, it was *My Life as a Teenage Robot*—just what my brain at the time thought of as retro. And so I was like, "TO THE FUTURE! Everything should look like it's never existed before!" I didn't want to see people my age going, "Here's my take on this thing that's already happened." This stylistic conformity upset me, even if it was used on shows that I liked.

So there was a certain pride in having come from a complete lack of training, because to me, that is what training did to people—"Draw like this or you can't have a show." But now I'm jealous of those people because they know how to draw better than me, at least on a technical level. [laughs] I can only draw like me.

When it comes to form, the *Zim* designs exist in a hybrid space between flat graphic flair and round, dimensional objects that can be rotated smoothly and realistically across 360 degrees, like a 3-D model. The model packs illustrate volumetric forms that are the base for each character's head. The intention is that artists will use these constructed forms when drawing the characters from all sorts of cinematic angles, with additional detail wrapped on to those forms.

The characters have full turn-around model sheets and can be drawn from most angles, with some graphic eccentricities—such as Gaz's hair—looking correct from each key angle but proving difficult to draw for less formal poses. Any artist who has ever tried to draw something like Beavis or Butt-Head, or a simple picture of Phineas and Ferb front-facing the camera, can appreciate that such funky cartoon design has its limitations and peculiarities. For more examples, see any cartoon produced by

Above: Some of the underlying structure in the designs of the "average adult mouth chart" and Zim himself.



IF A CHARACTER'S  
HEAD ELONGATES  
TO SCREAM...

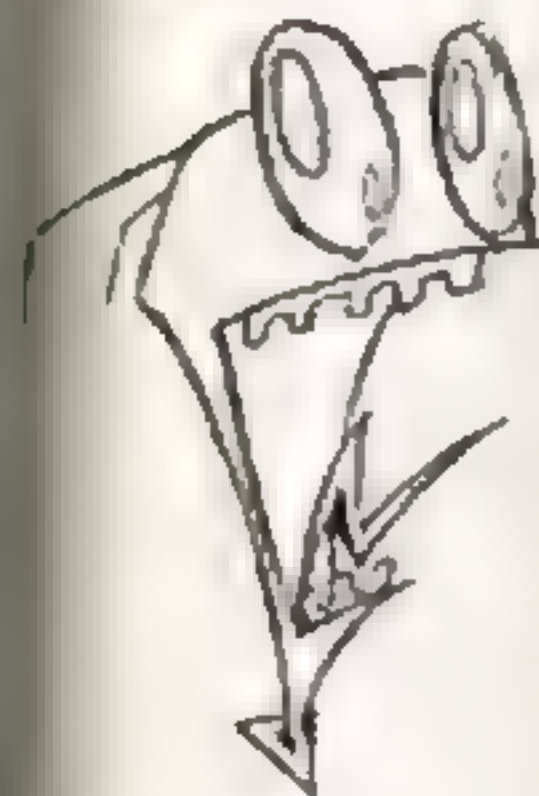
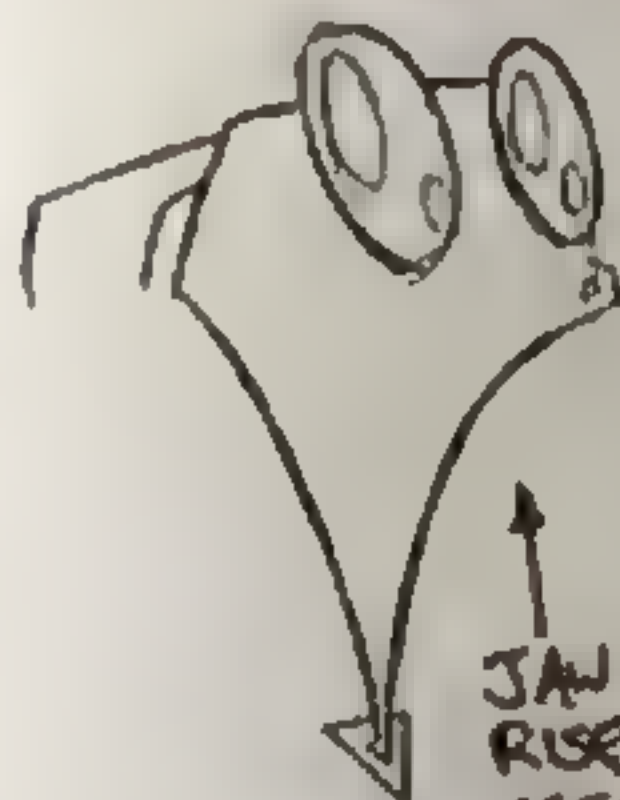


FIG. (A)

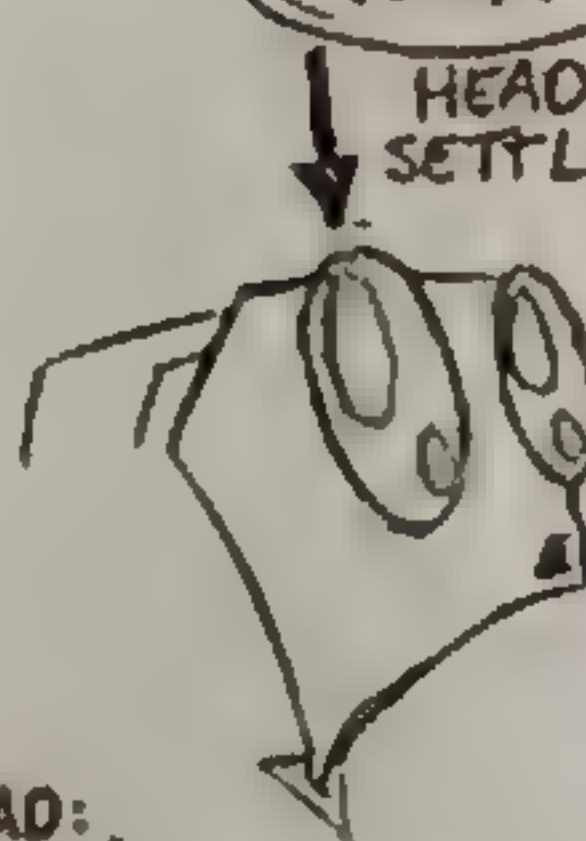
**No**



JAW  
RISES TO  
MEET HEAD:  
INCORRECT!

FIG. (B)  
**No**

**YES!!!**



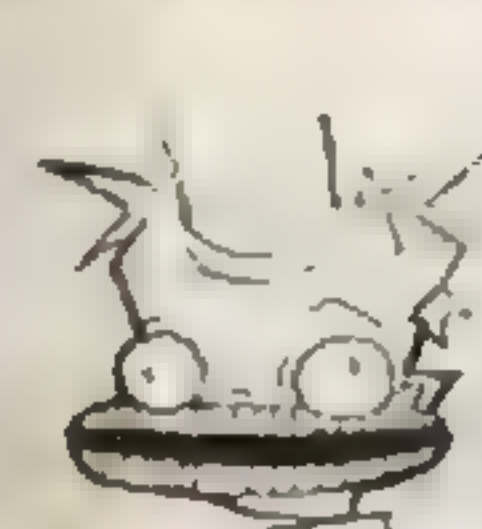
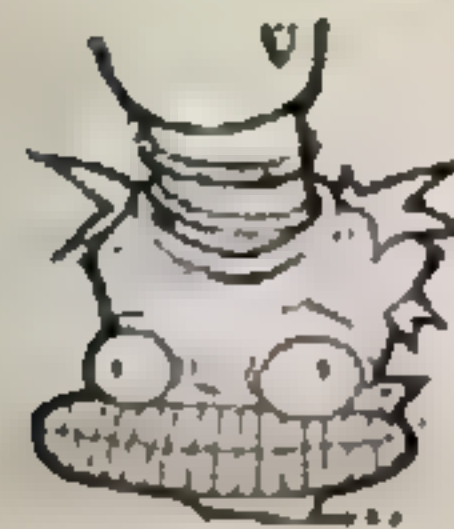
HEAD  
SETTLES  
TO  
MEET  
JAW:  
CORRECT

FIG. (C)  
**YES**

THIS HAS BEEN A CONSISTANT PROBLEM. PLEASE USE  
THIS REFERENCE SHEET TO PROVIDE THE NEEDED SOLUTION.  
-STEVE R.

22LEIN3

# NICK'S MOUTH



-NICK DOESN'T HAVE A LOT OF MOUTH POSITIONS,  
LIKE TIM OR DIB - RATHER, HIS TEETH JUST  
'CHOMP' UP AND DOWN, IN A PERMANENT TETHY  
GRIN/GRINACE.  
-OTHERWISE, FOLLOW THE VARIATIONS DRAWN  
IN THE BOARD - THEY ARE PRETTY RELIABLE  
IN THIS CASE

THANKS,  
BRYAN K

Nickelodeon stalwart Klasky Csupo. This type of stylish  
2-D cartoon design is typical in television animation as it is  
in independent films, where individual style is a virtue.

Aaron Alexovich began work on the series as assist-  
ant character designer, then soon graduated to character  
designer. His own work's qualities dovetailed with  
Jhonon's perfectly. Many of the beings in *Zim* straddle  
a line between cute and grotesque, or even hopscotch  
back and forth during one of many body transforma-  
tions that the characters often endure. Sometimes they  
are cute, sometimes they suffer miserably.

Aaron: I'm just going to go ahead and say it: We're  
in the Tim Burton world, where it's funny  
it goes right up to this horrible little edge, and  
it most falls off into being disturbing. Playing with  
horror is really fun for me.

I guess maybe there's just something extra-  
disturbing about seeing horrible things happen  
to something that's really delightful, really cute. It  
intensifies the horror of it, and I really like that.

There's this artist that Jhonon and I both really  
love, Junji Ito. His comics will have these ideas  
that, if I were to describe them to you, you'd just  
laugh because they sound so silly, but the way he's  
drawn them, they're just absolutely horrifying.

Jhonon: I think of it as the horror is the comedy  
and the comedy is the horror. For me, I've always  
loved comedy as horror. The best horror, if you  
describe the scenario, is inherently absurd-some  
of the scariest stuff in the world sounds like a joke.  
When we were kids my brother and I would watch  
horror movies, and we would laugh, but at night, I

would think about these horror movies and I'd be  
freaking out. It was just an incredible combination  
of emotions and physical and mental responses. I  
can't say that I understand the psychology be-  
hind it, but it fascinates me. It goes back to how I  
wanted to put these things in *Zim*. The things that  
are scary, I wanted them to actually be scary. I  
didn't want it to be kid-scary. I didn't want it to be  
cute-scary.

## Main Characters

The psyches of *Zim*'s main characters churn in a por-  
pourri of pride, vengeance, desire, and cruelty. The cast  
includes a gleeful would-be conqueror (*Zim*), a neglect-  
ful celebrity parent (Professor Membrane), a soul-  
crushing, shape-shifting teacher (Ms. Bitters), and more!  
The interactions of the personalities create a delightful



Above: Animation notes by director Steve Ross  
and art director Bryan Konietzko



Derek—

JHONEN IS STILL VERY CONCERNED WITH THE INCONSISTENCY OF THE CLEAN-UP LINE WEIGHT AND QUALITY. ALL OF AARON'S MODEL SHEETS ARE A GREAT GUIDE, BUT I HAD HIM DRAW UP THESE 3 SHEETS AS THE DEFINITIVE STANDARD. PLEASE DISTRIBUTE THESE TO EACH ARTIST OF EACH CLEAN UP TEAM, AND EXPLAIN THE IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOWING THEM. THANKS —  
YOU'RE FIRED!

-BRYAN  
ENIETZ

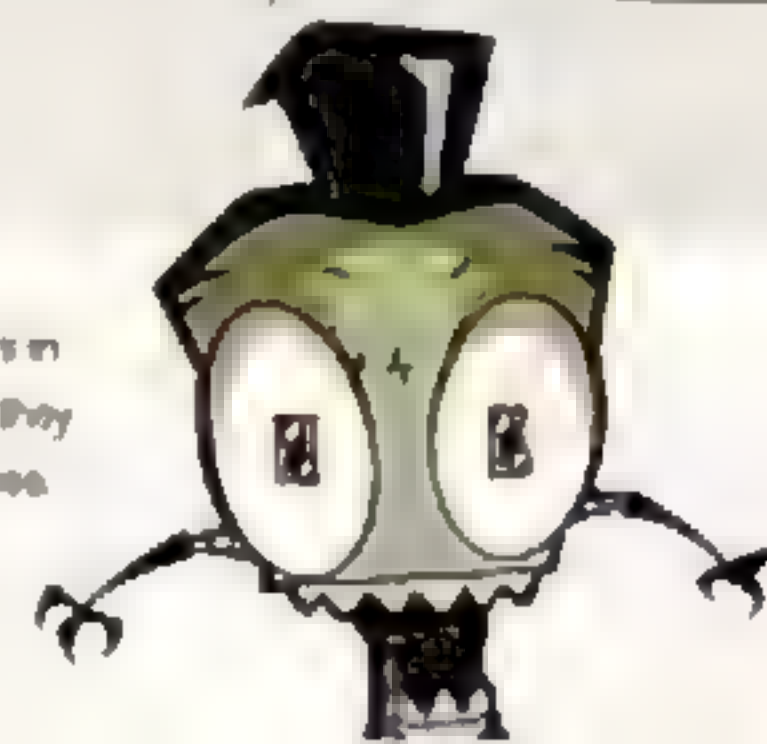
concoction of caustic bile splashing around in horrible, humorous ways. The characters are designed and written exactly for this purpose: to chafe against one another for your entertainment.

**Rikki Simons [colorist; voice of Gir]:** I like how specifically the characters react to each other. That's always a sign of good writing: when characters don't react to each other exactly in the same ways.

**Chris Viscardi (Executive Producer, Nickelodeon):** *Invader Zim's* characters resonate because no matter how well-intentioned some of the characters may be, they're all idiots. And idiocy is timeless! And idiocy is funny! Especially in a cartoon.

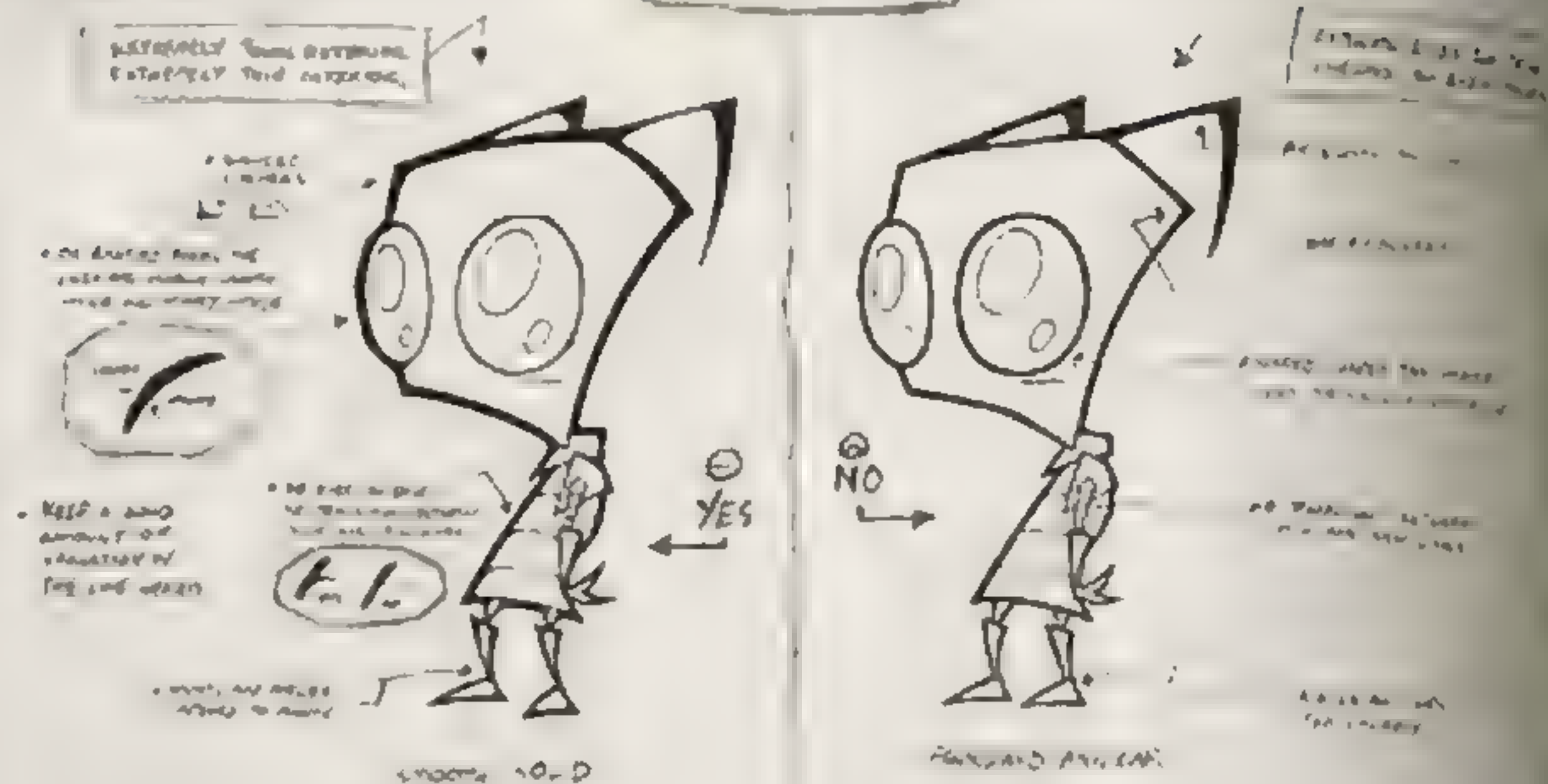
**This spread:** Cleanup guides created by character designer Aaron Aissazneh with a note by art director Elyan Karamzko to oversee supervisor Derek

Evenfield. The difference in the dos and don'ts in these guides seem minor, but when enforced they maintain the visual uniqueness of Zim the scribe.



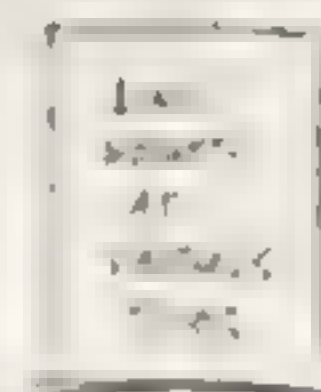
## STOCK CLEAN-UP GUIDES FOR ALL CHARACTERS

## DO's and DON'Ts

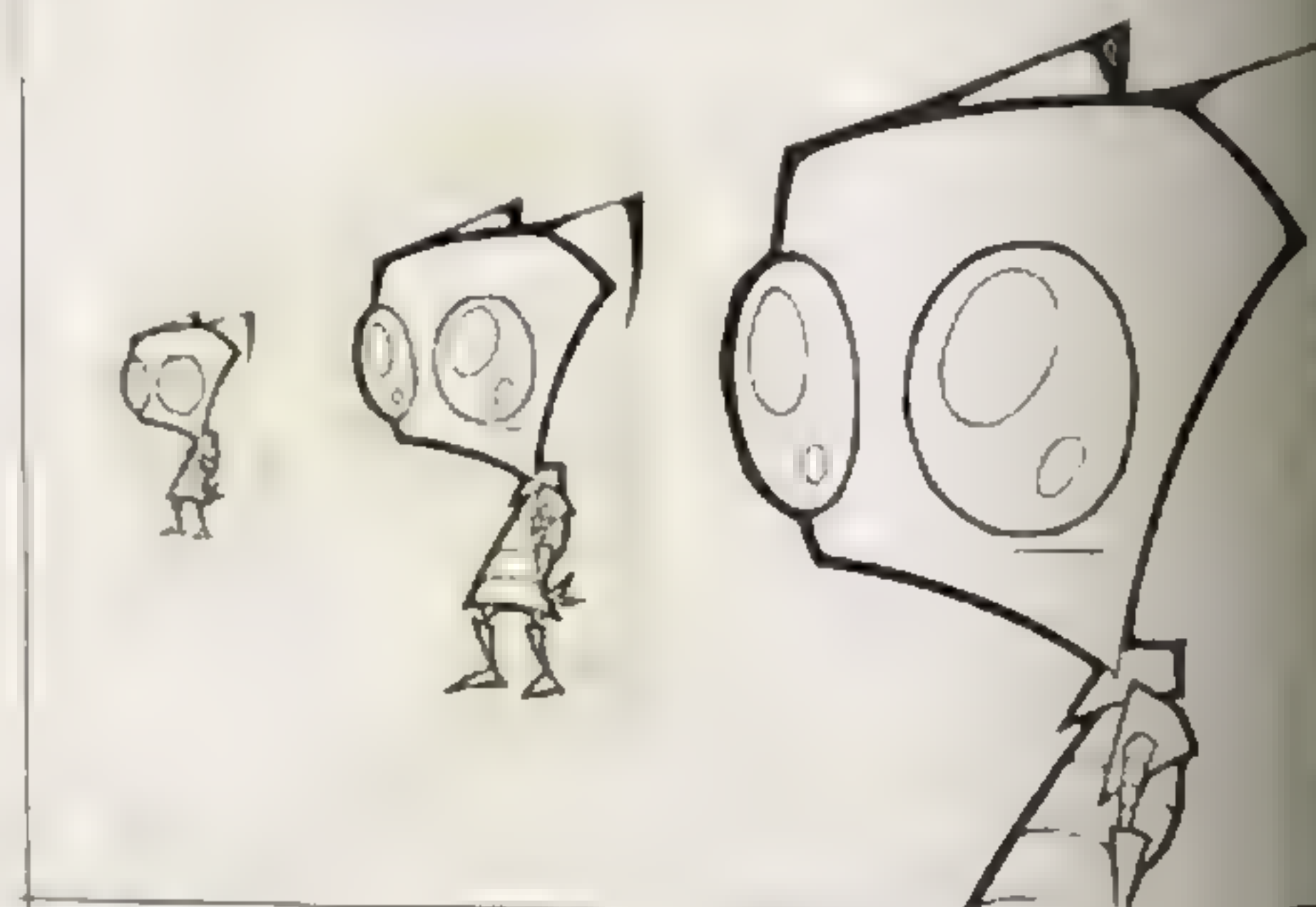


1003

STOCK CLEAN-UP GUIDES  
FOR ALL CHARACTERS. 1\_\_\_\_



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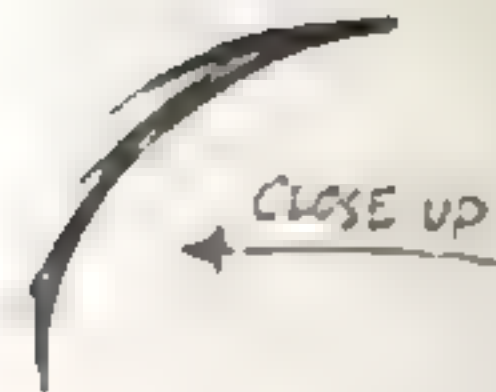
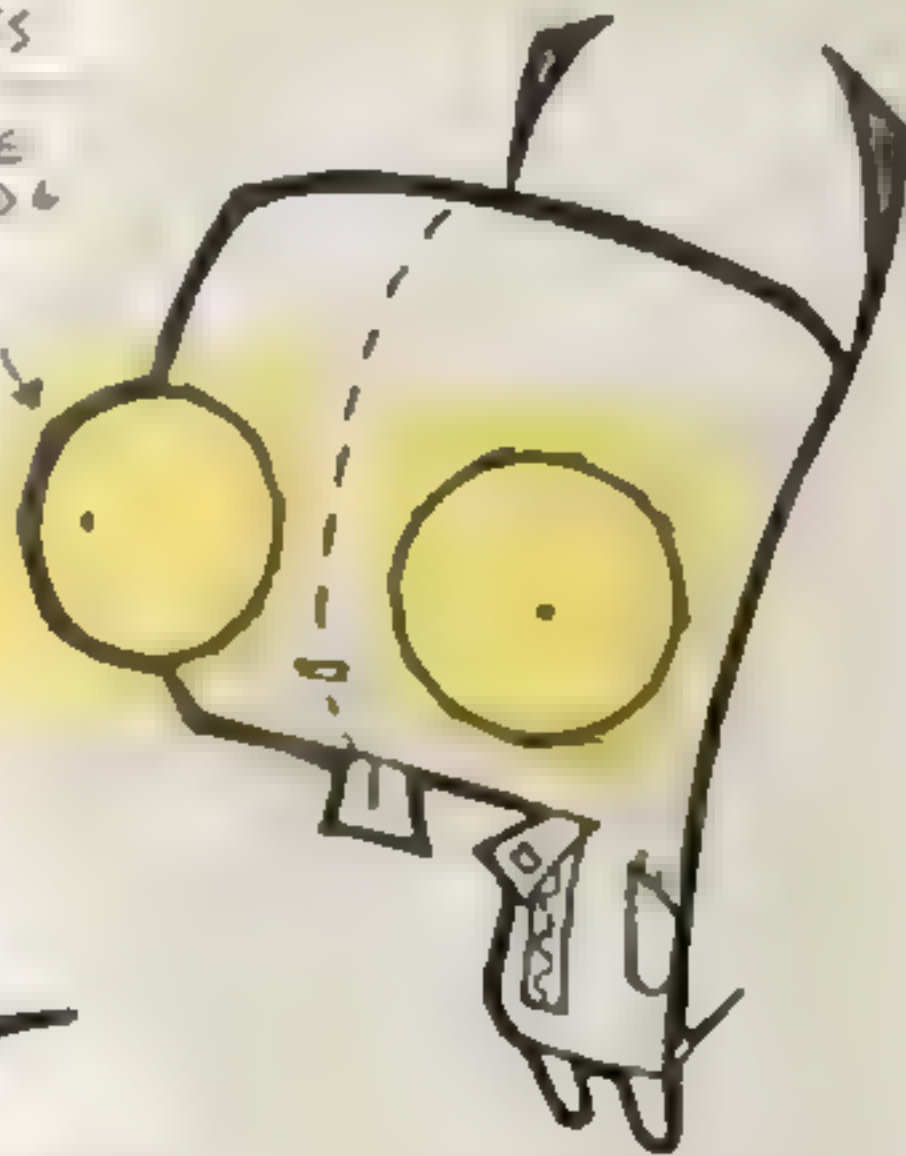
# STOCK CLEAN-UP GUIDES FOR ALL CHARACTERS

## SPECIAL CASES

ENIETZ

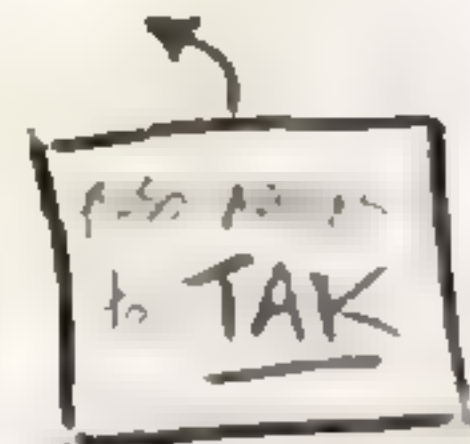
1) DO NOT LET  
THEY AROUND THE  
AROUND THE EYES

RE LINE  
EXTEND  
THE LINE



2) WHEN OPEN,  
HAS TO BE  
A THICK BLACK  
OUTLINE

ALMOST AS  
THICK AS THE  
LATERAL LINES



3 of 3



1) THE  
MOUTH  
THE  
THE  
THE



CLEAN UP LINE WITH  
KNEEDER



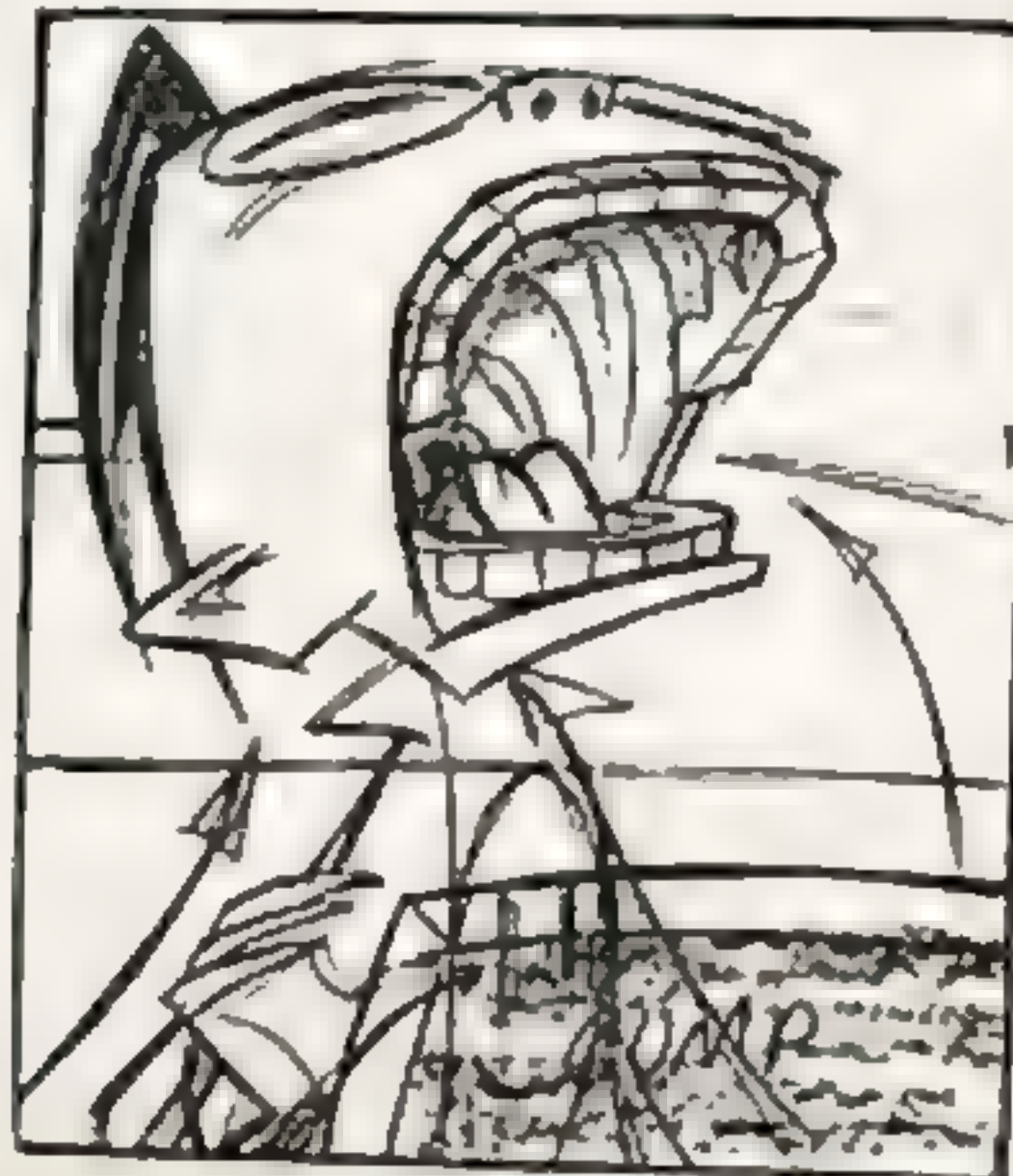
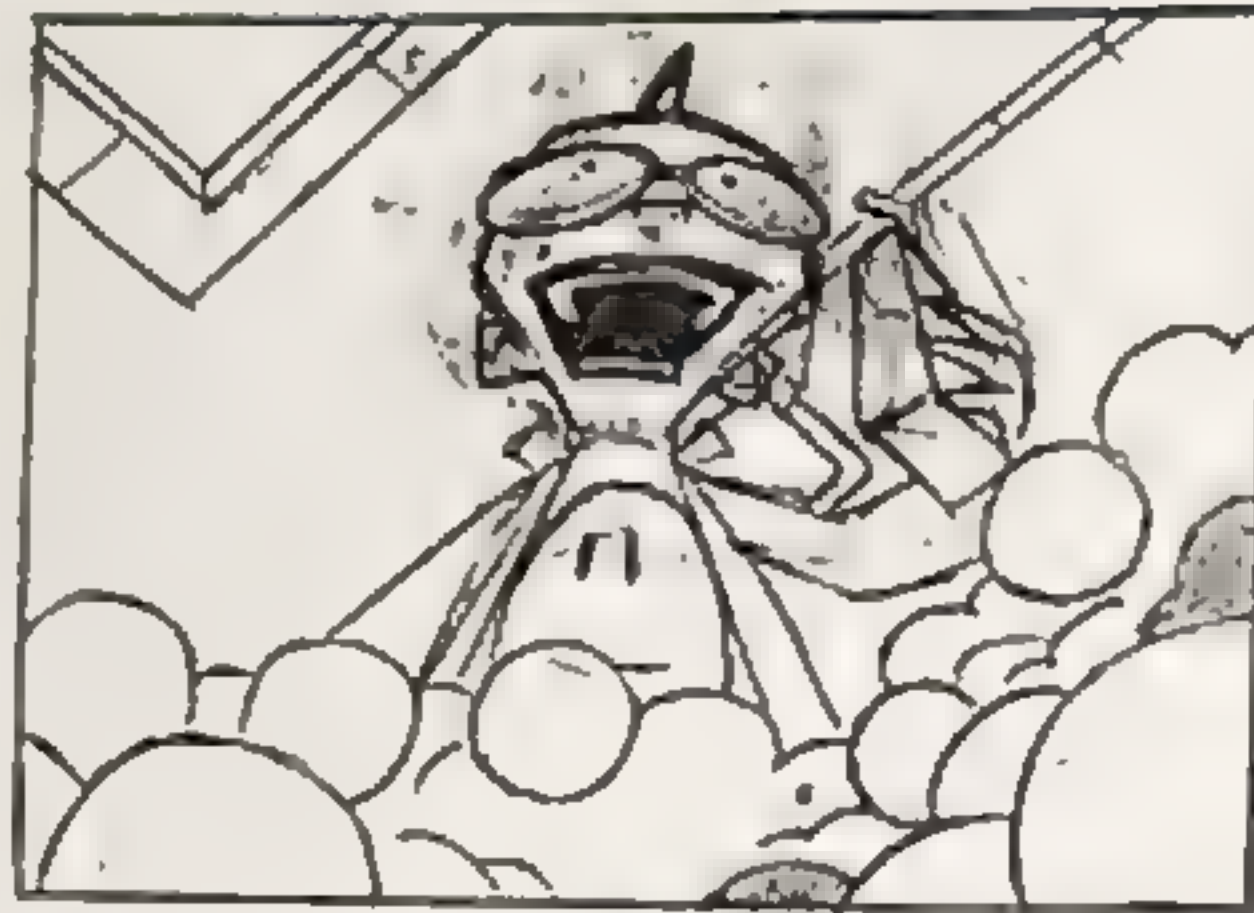
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# CHARACTER CLEAN-UP REFERENCE

ON MODEL

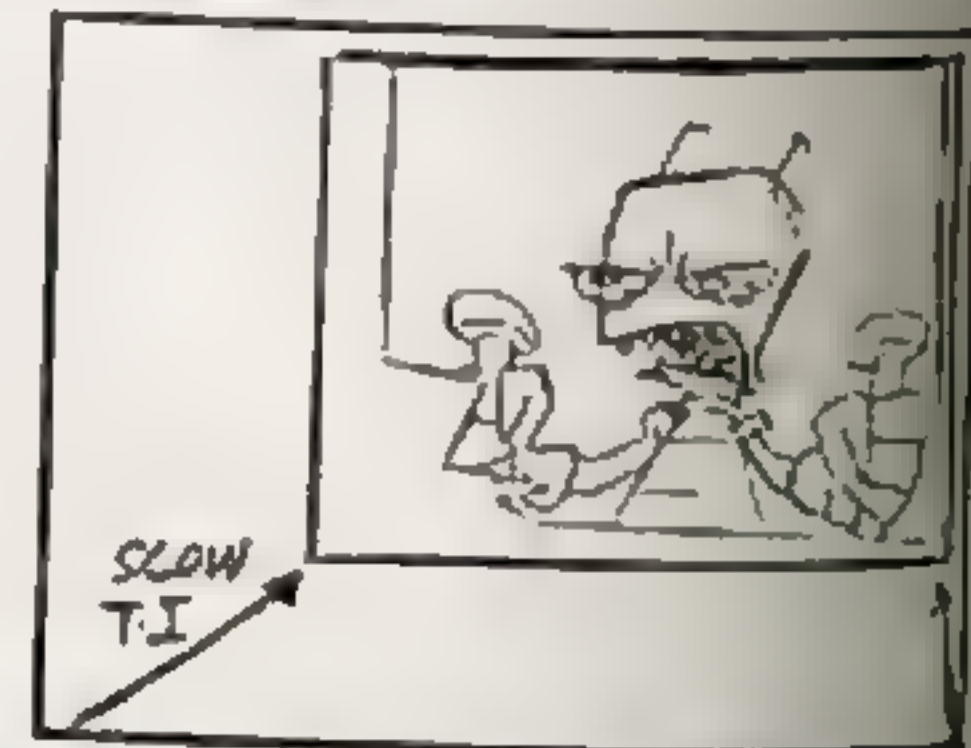
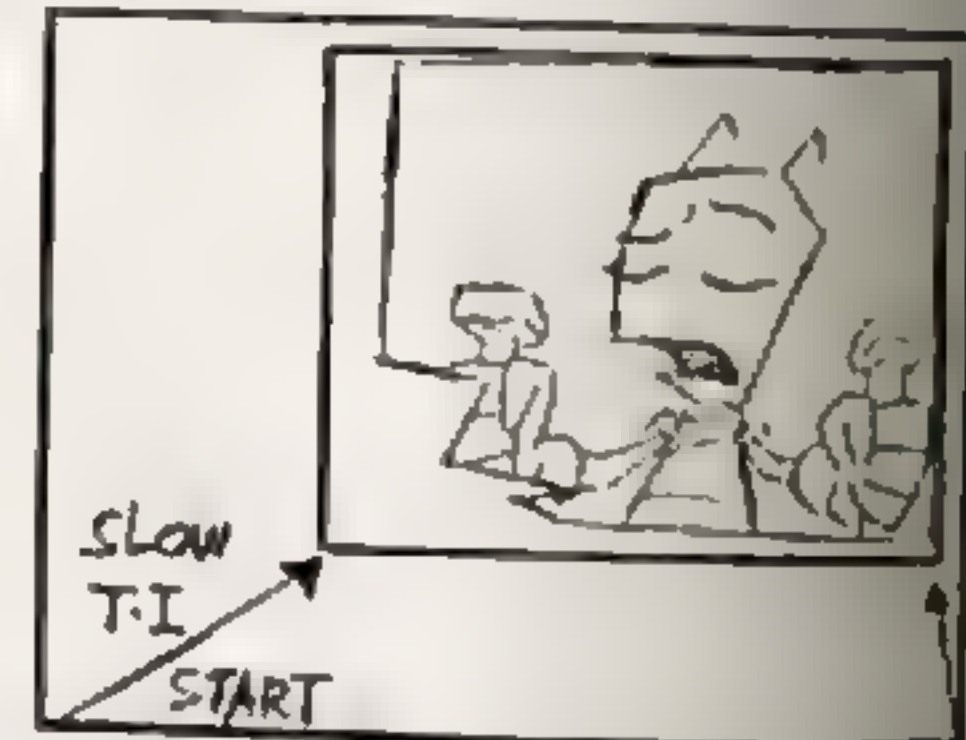
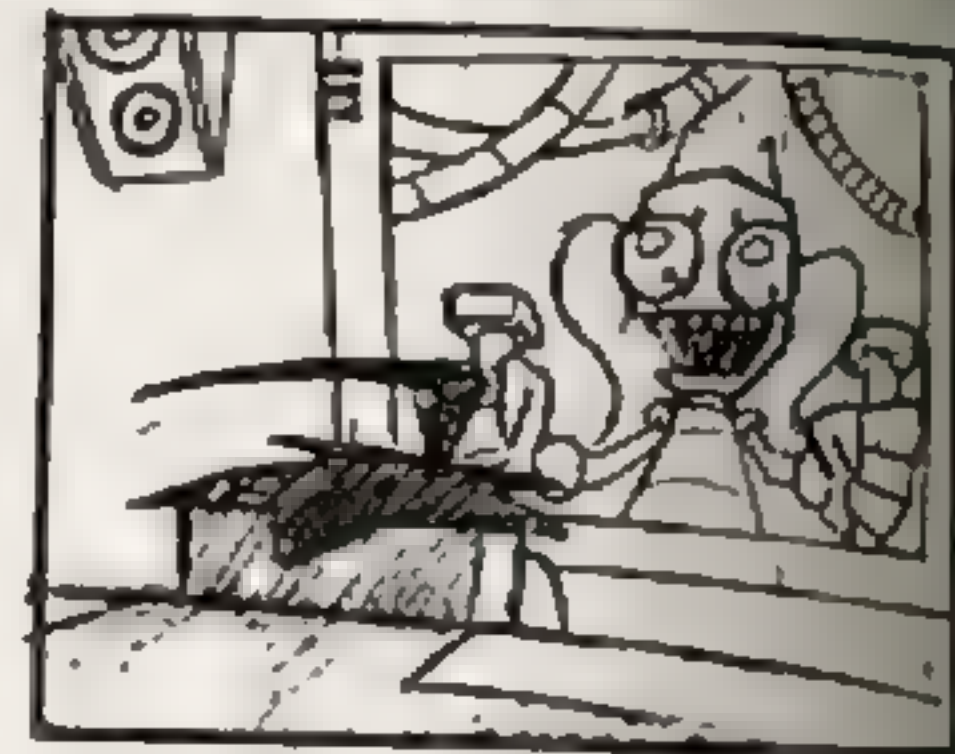
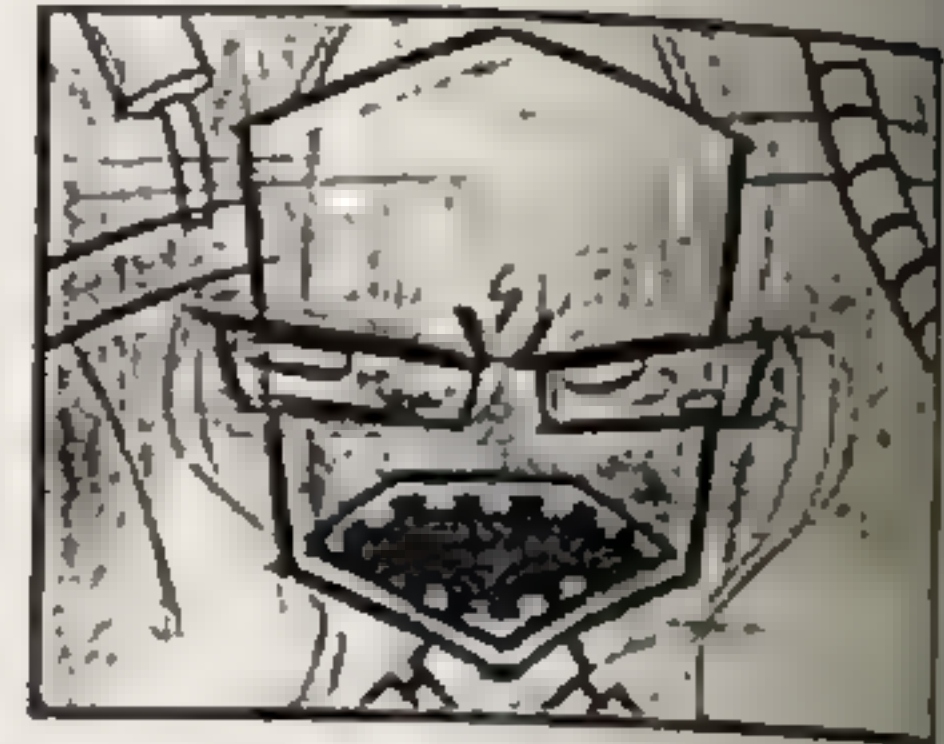
ROUGH



# CHARACTER CLEAN-UP REFERENCE

ON MODEL

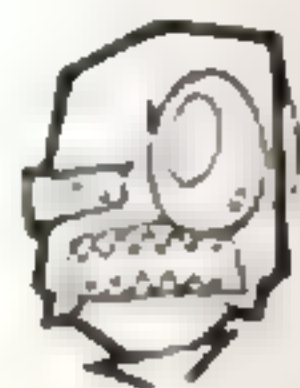
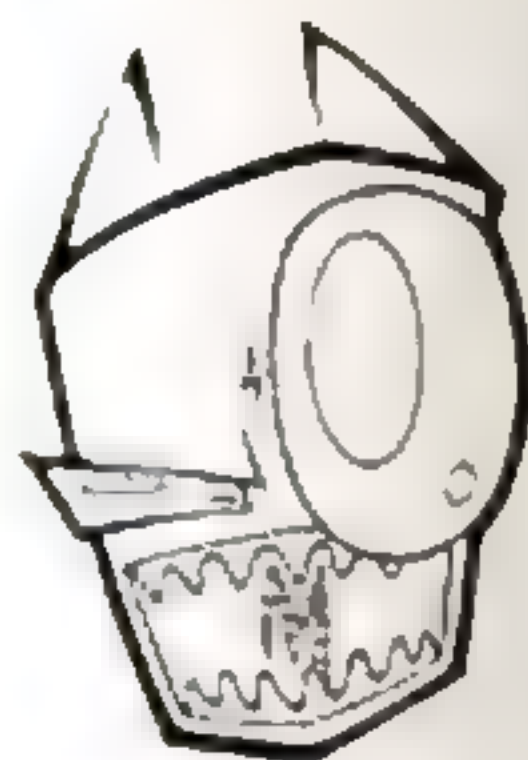
ROUGH



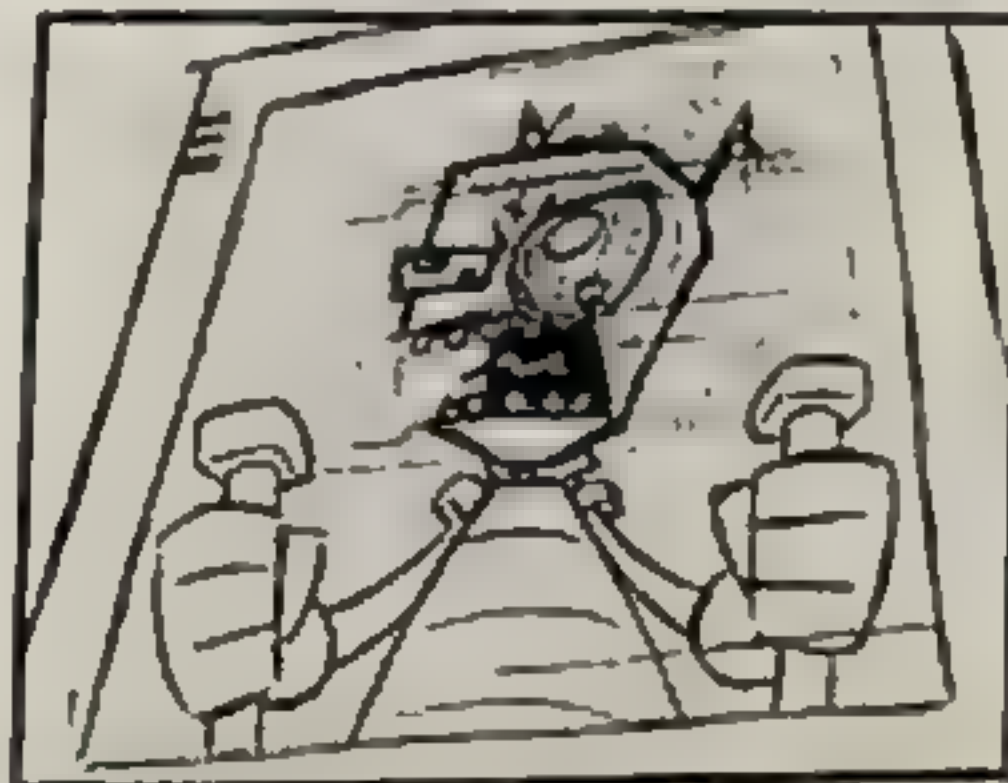
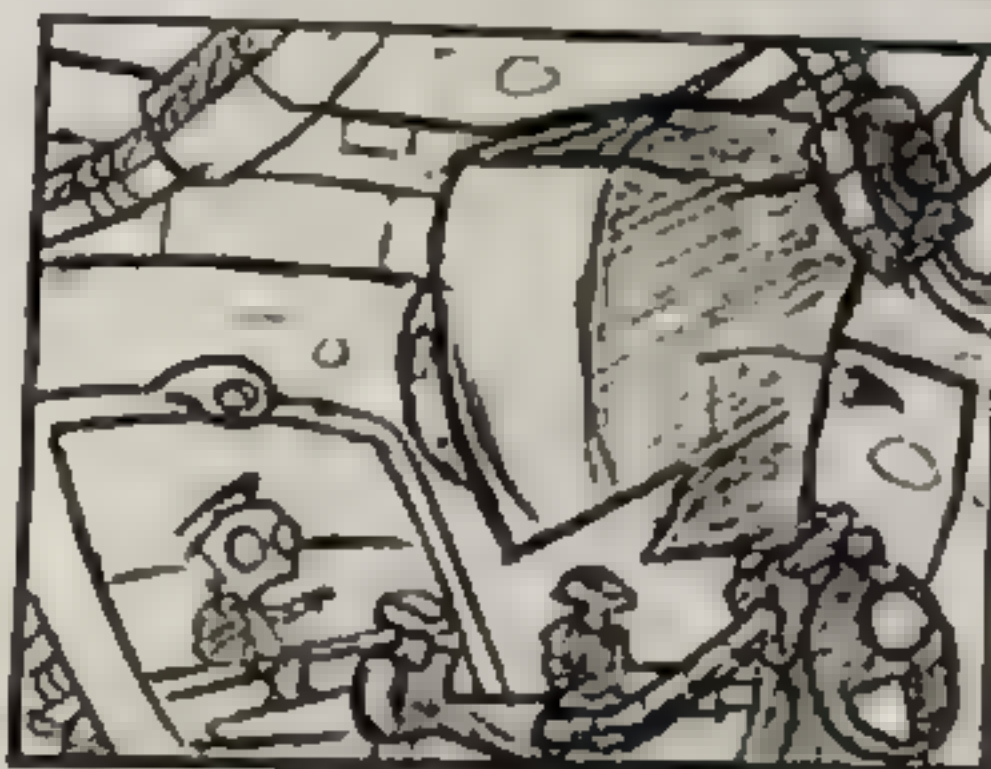
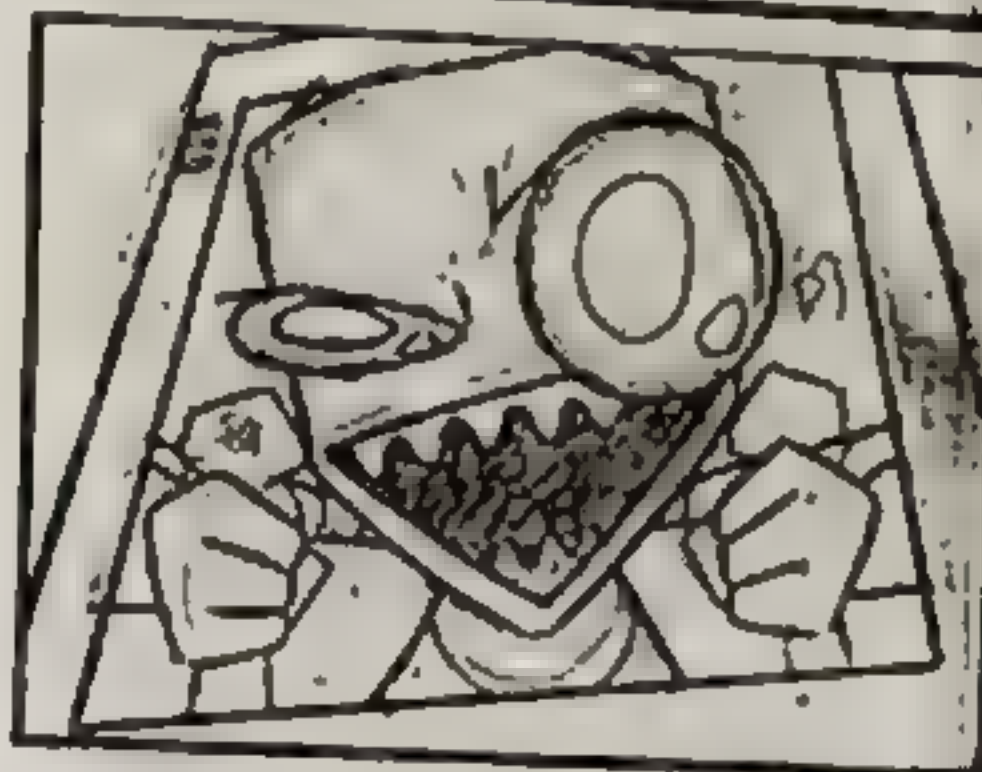
CHARACTER CLEAN-UP



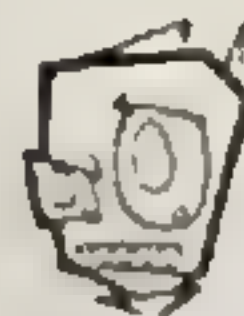
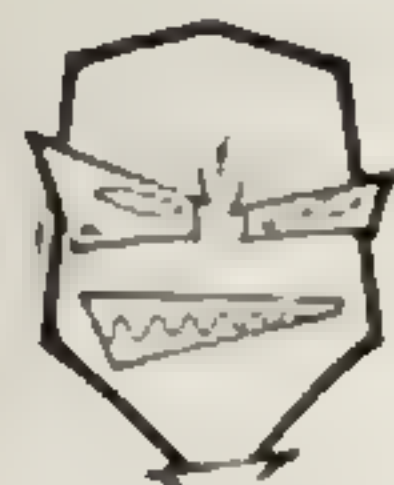
CHARACTER CLEAN-UP REFERENCE  
ON MODEL



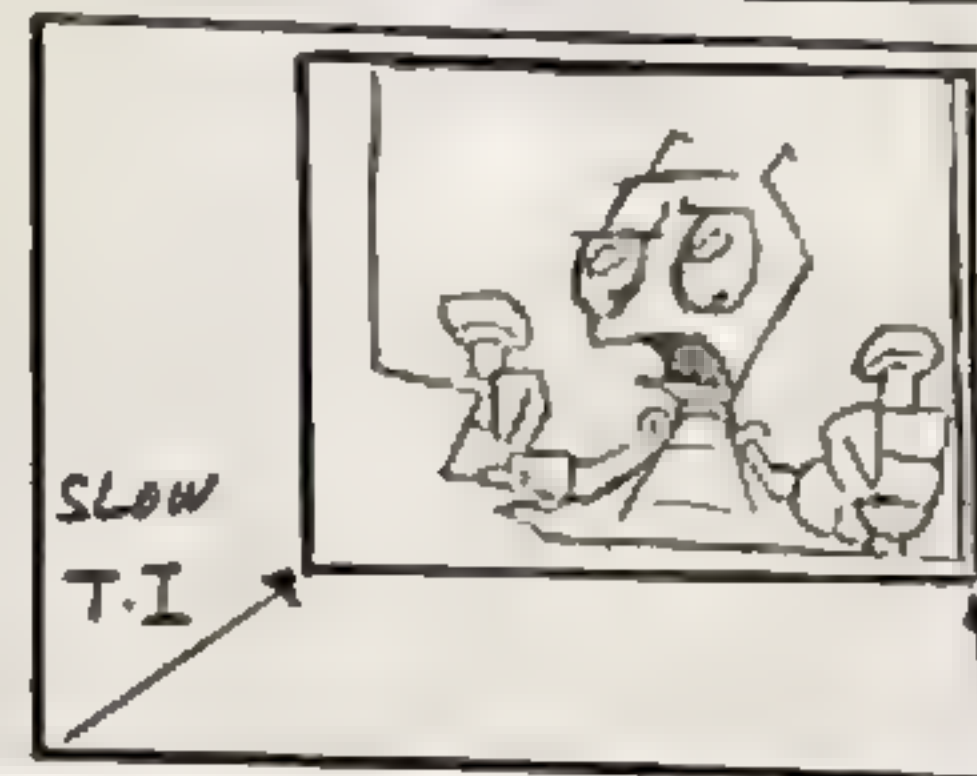
ROUGH



CHARACTER CLEAN-UP REFERENCE  
ON MODEL



ROUGH



SLOW  
T.I

This spread: A selection of four character clean-up reference sheets which were designed to assist the animation studio in interpreting the storyboard

drawings into on-model animation drawings. In addition to the line qualities detailed on the previous spread, these clean-up on-model drawings show

many of the design specifics of the series that artists would have to familiarize themselves with, such as the flattening and spacing out of Dib's teeth.

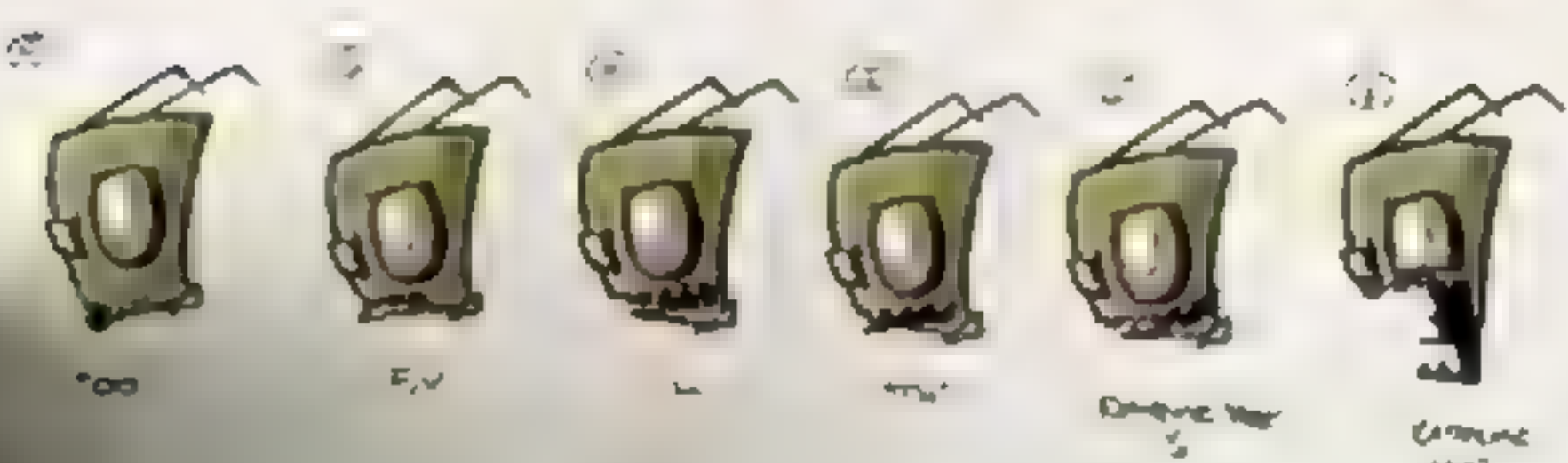
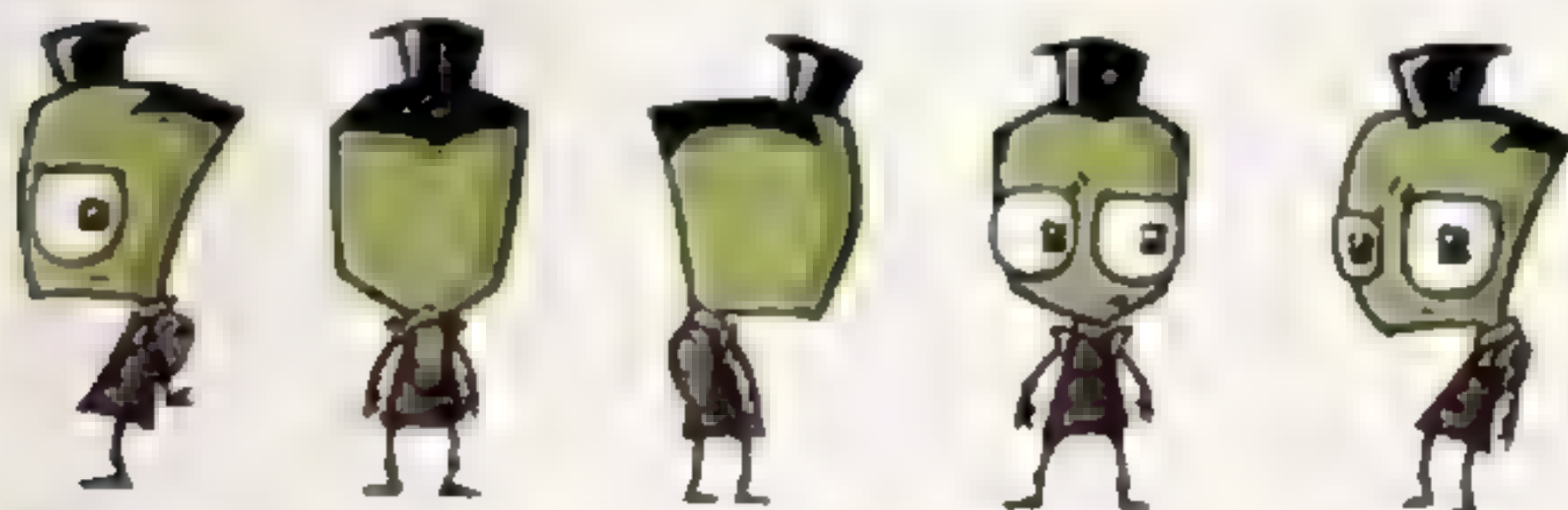
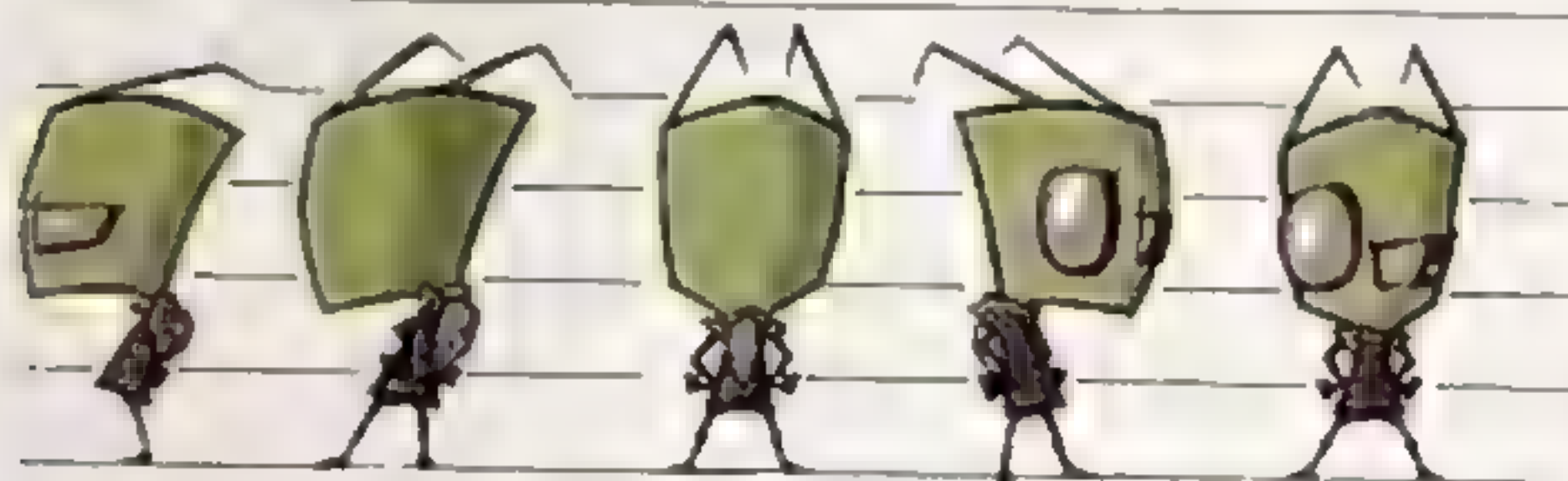


Zim is a tenacious, tireless, and confident invader. Zim's narcissistic tendencies render him unable to understand that he is not the Almighty Talbot's finest invader, but in fact, the butt of their jokes. His only desire is to prove his worthiness by successfully laying the groundwork for the Earth's total surrender. Zim is not dumb, but extremely paranoid and proud, and a stranger on a strange planet, learning, observing, collecting, and making outrageous, off-base plans founded on culturally Earth-ignorant assertions.

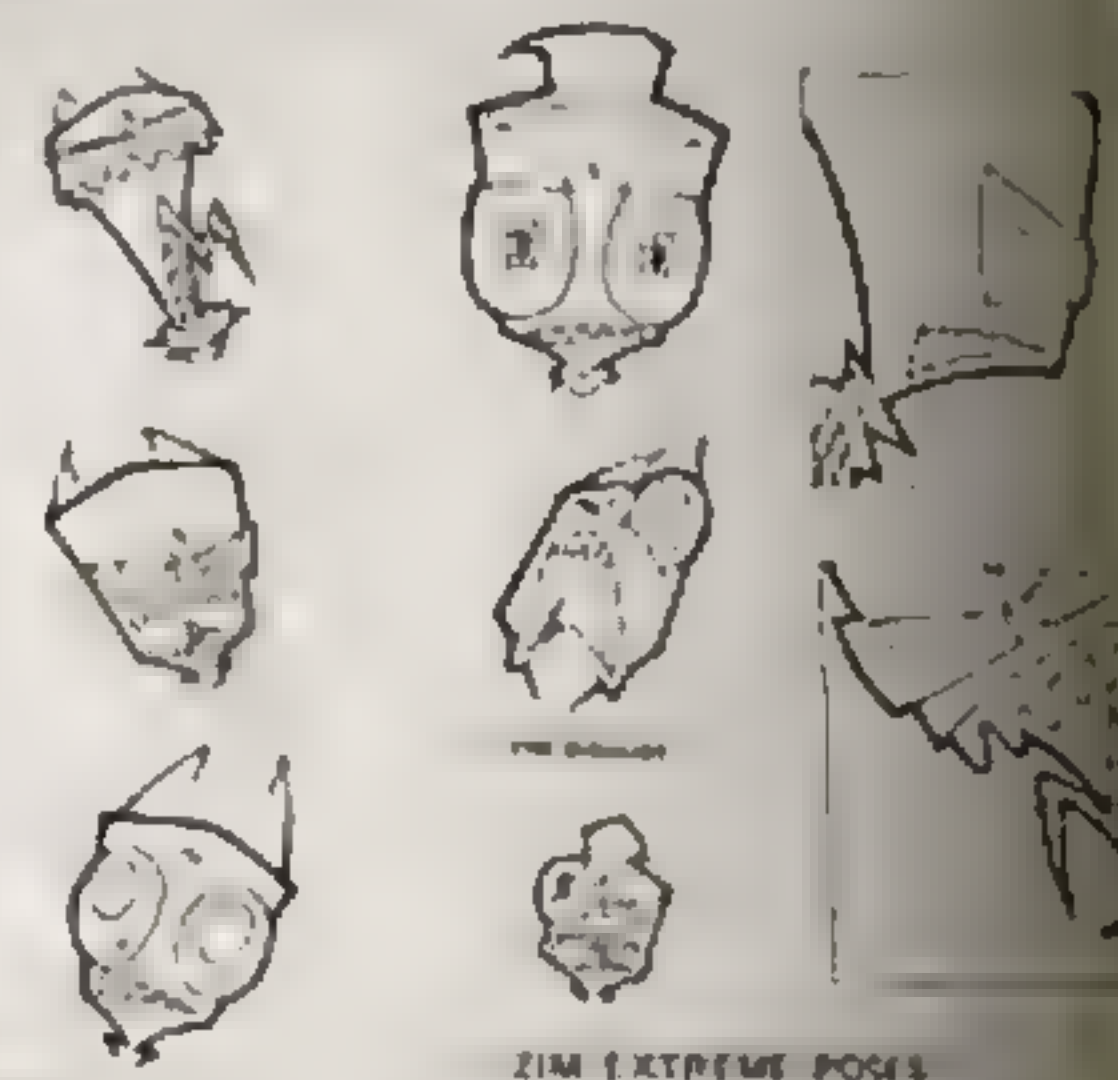
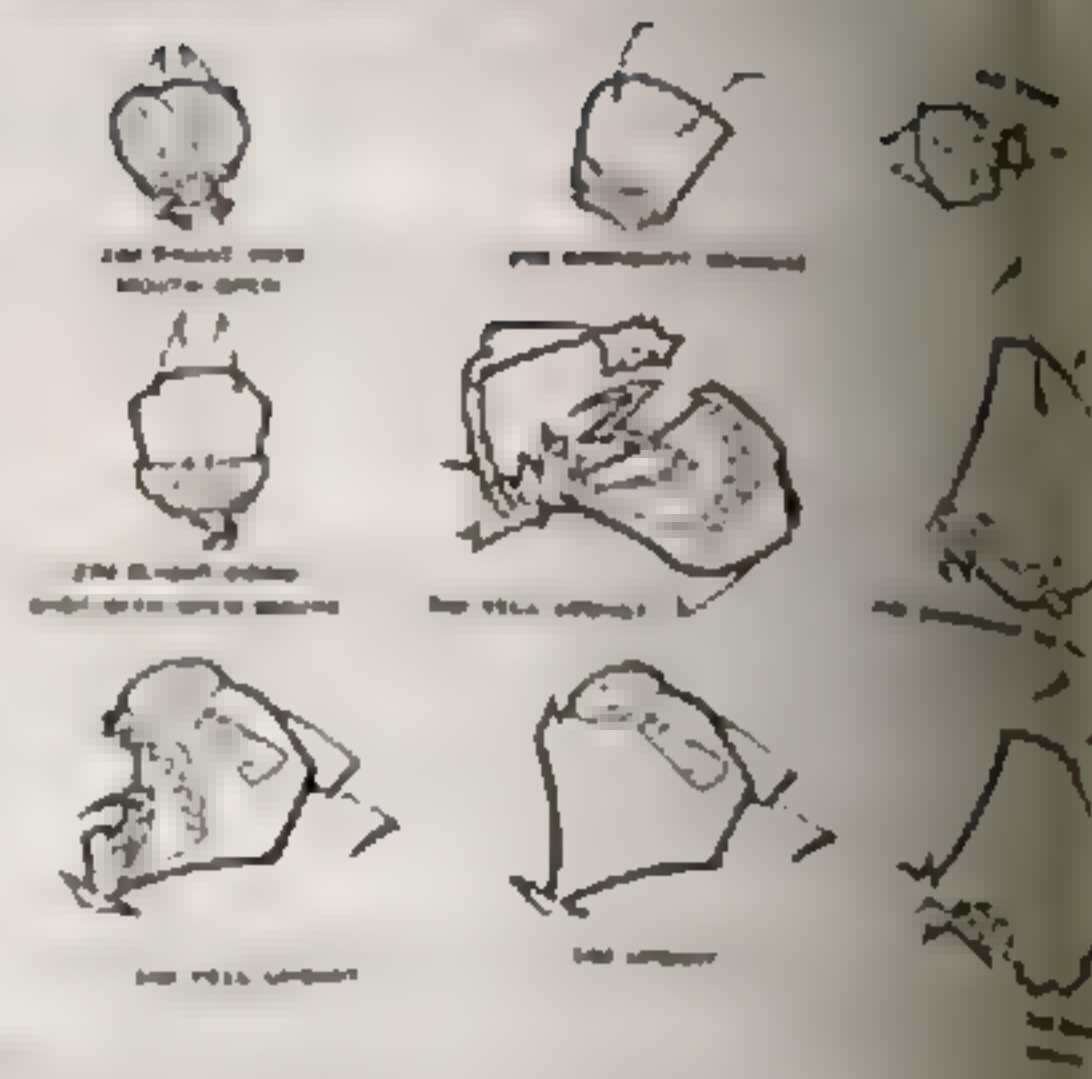
**Rikki:** I always thought that Zim was a combination of all of Jhonen's worst personality habits, and I always thought that he did it consciously. He just

looks at himself, he says "This is the worst thing about me," and then he puts it in Zim. Because Zim is so over-the-top, that's what's great about Richard Horvitz doing the voice—because Richard is so over-the-top himself, as a human being. Richard is perfect for Zim. He can direct all of his anxiety into his voice acting. It just explodes out of the mouth of that character.

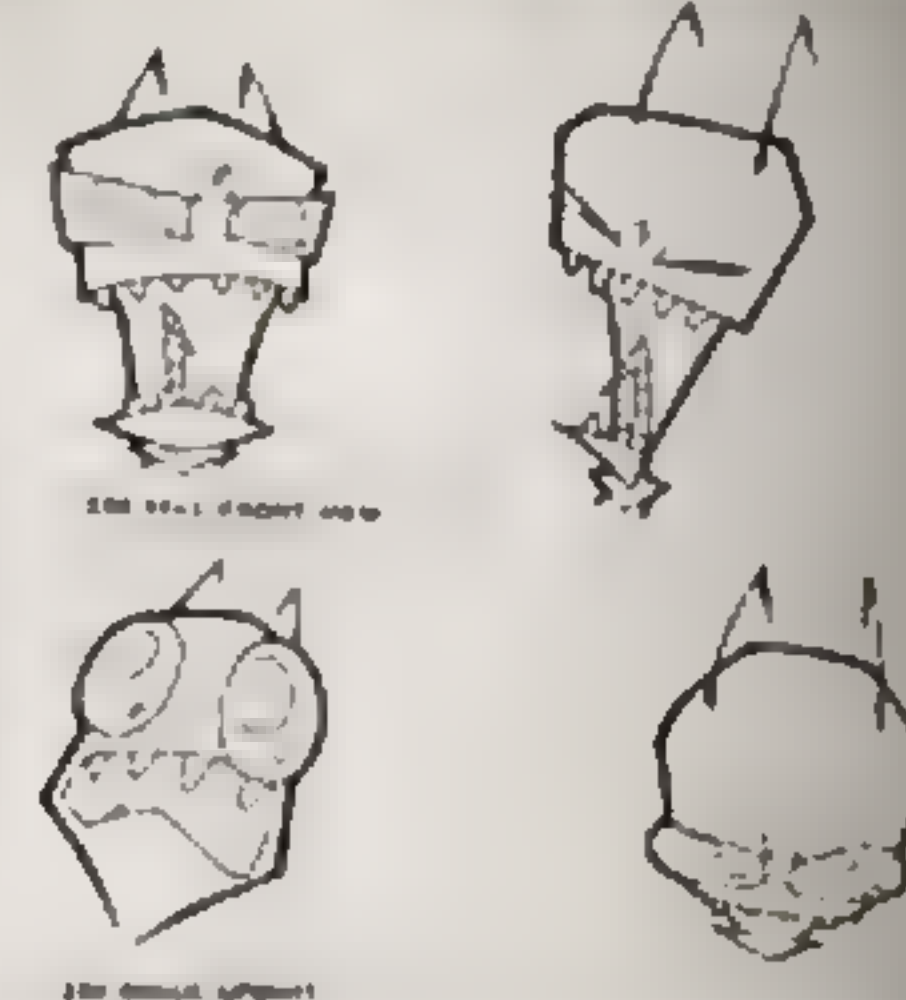
**Eric Trueheart [writer]:** You know Zim screaming was usually good for a laugh. Screaming in pain. Screaming in fear. Screaming in frustration. It didn't matter. The combination of his screaming design and Richard's insane performance usually gave you something hilarious.



Zim as (HATED) RICKY RAY



ZIM EXTREME POSES



This spread: Various turnaround and success pose models for Zim including from "I'm Not Horrible X-Mas Ever" (EP27).





WHEN ZIM OR OTHER IRKEN ALIENS  
SMILE THEIR TEETH, DRAW THEM  
FLARED AND INTERLOCKED LIKE  
THIS



IN AN EXTREME YELL, ZIM'S TEETH CAN  
FLARE OUT AND SHARPEN SLIGHTLY, AND  
BECOME FLARED, LIKE IN THE ABOVE  
DRAWING.



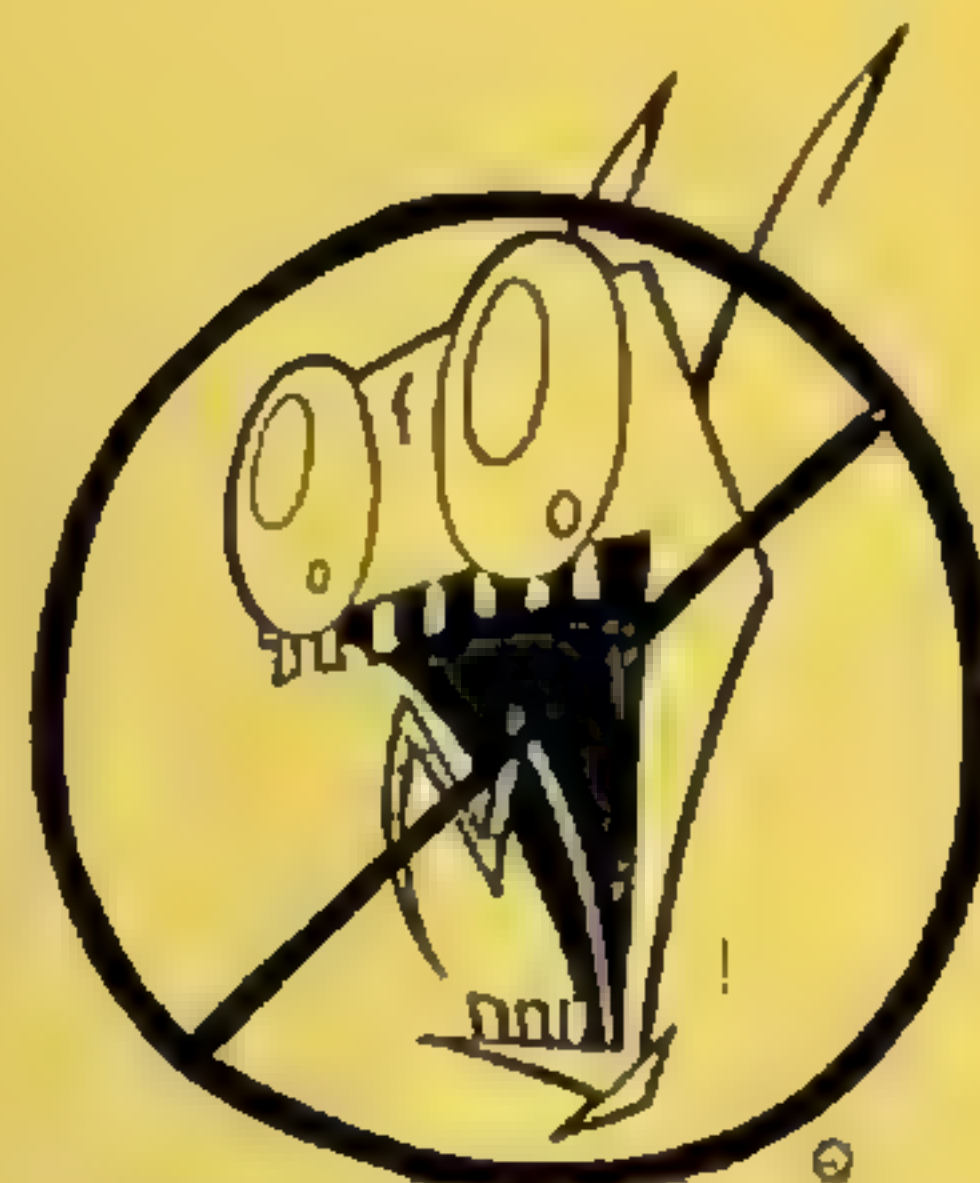
FOR A VERY EXTREME TEETHING SMILE,  
ZIM'S AND OTHER IRKEN ALIENS' TEETH  
CAN BE CREATED IN A FLARED BEND,  
LIKE THE ABOVE DRAWING.



DO NOT DRAW ZIM'S CHIN LEADING  
UP TO HIS MOUTH LINE THIS. SEE ALTHOUGH  
THIS IS THE CORRECT WAY.



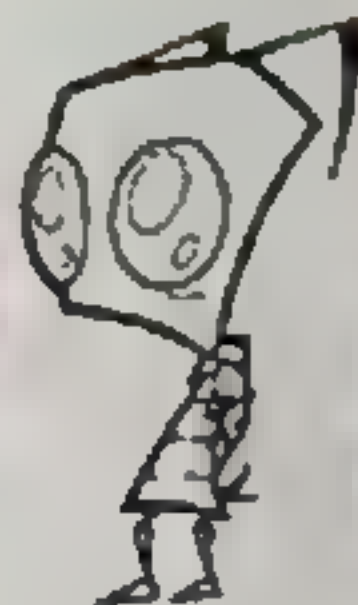
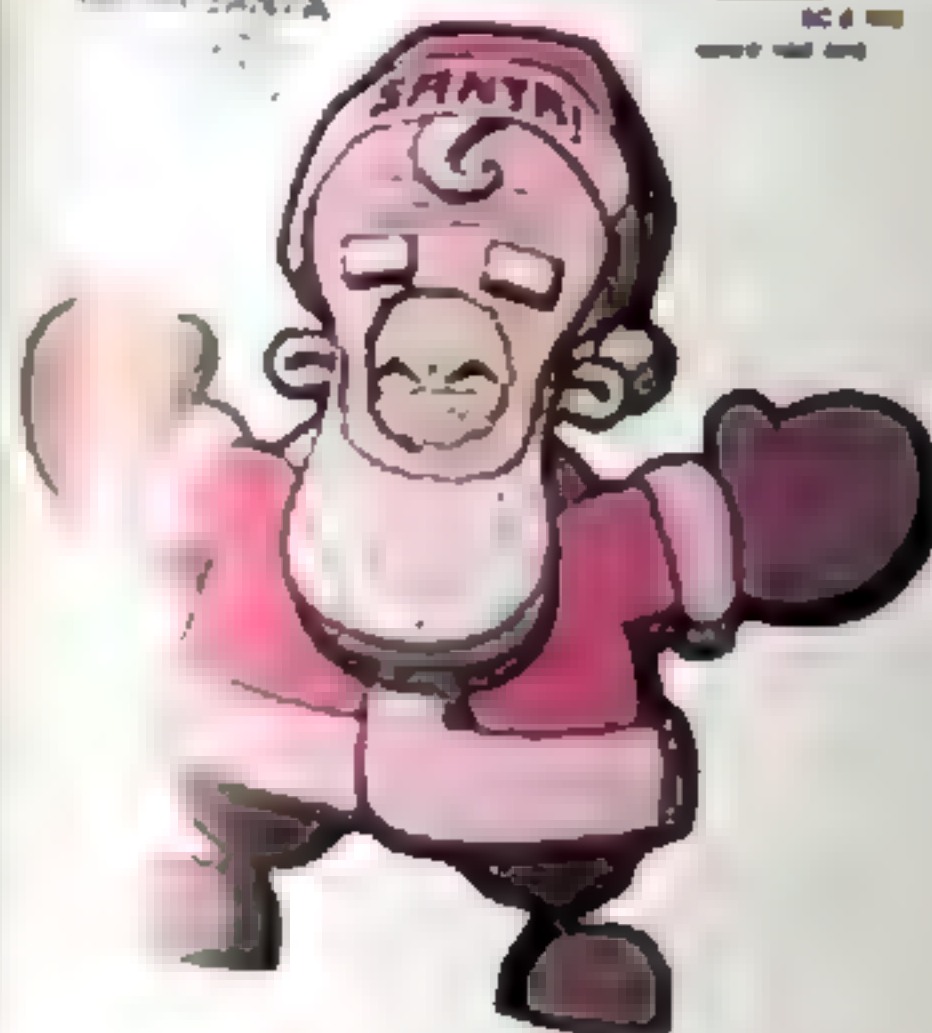
NEVER DRAW ZIM OR OTHER IRKEN  
ALIENS WITH STRETCH, SQUARED-OFF  
TEETH LIKE THESE. THAT IS DEEMED  
FOR DIB AND OTHER HUMANS.



DO NOT DRAW ZIM WITH SQUARED-OFF,  
SEPARATED TEETH — EVEN IN AN  
EXTREME YELL JUST AS THIS.

SPECIAL EDITION COSTUME  
SANTA

130B





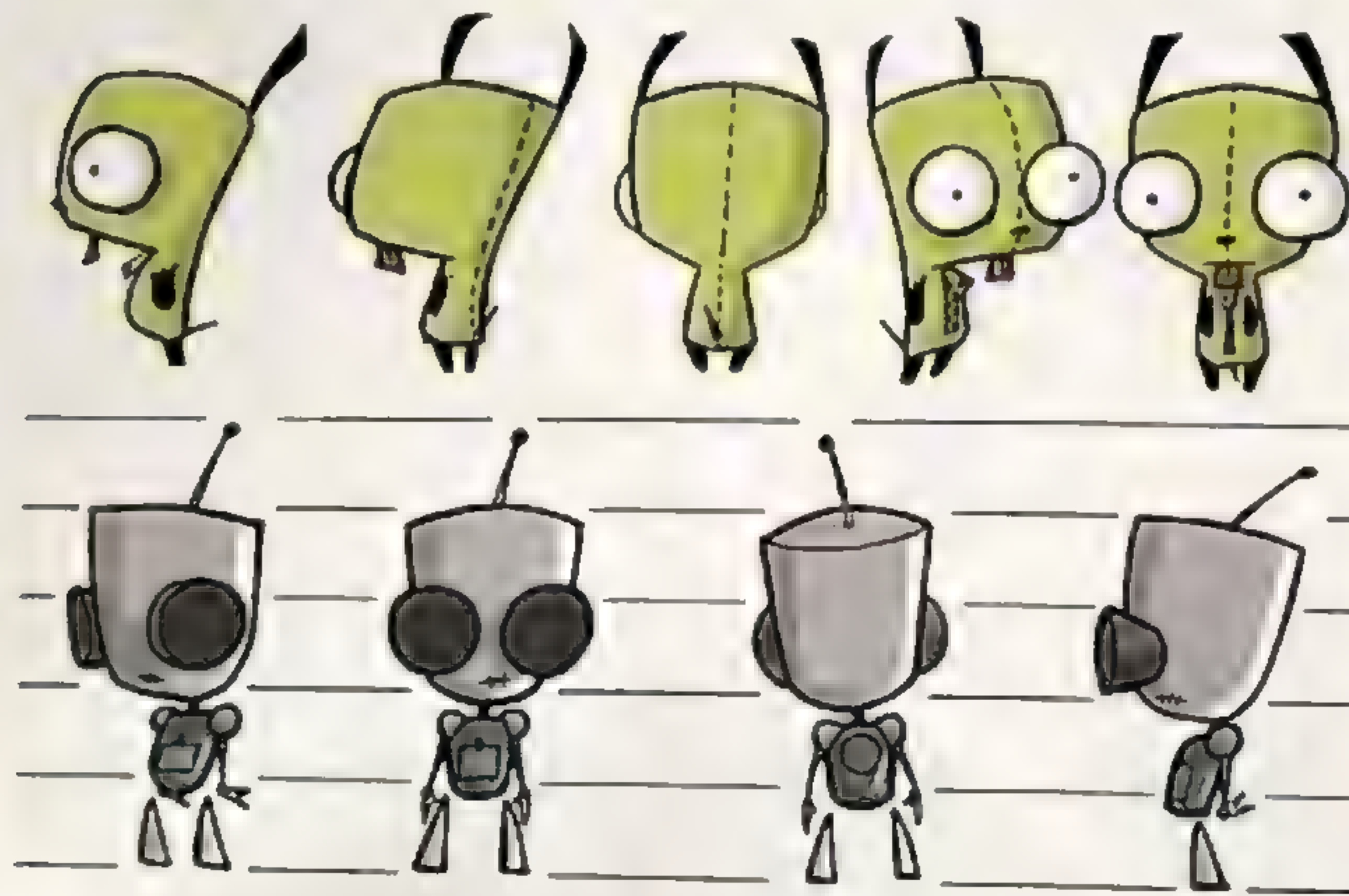
Gir is a malfunctioning robot sidekick to Zim, or as Zim puts it, "A robot slave of my own." Childlike, enthusiastic, and possessing a remarkably short attention span, Gir also eats an alarming amount of organic material for a mechanical being. Gir's eyes are blue, but occasionally turn red, indicating intermittent bursts of normal functionality. Gir's Earth disguise is an adorable green puppy jumpsuit.

**Rikki:** He's innocent, but his innocence is to the point of being a lunatic. Who knows what he does when he's completely unleashed? He's the one character who's happy because he's so stupid. And I think one of the lessons that Jhonen is trying to impart is that the happiest characters are the dumbest.

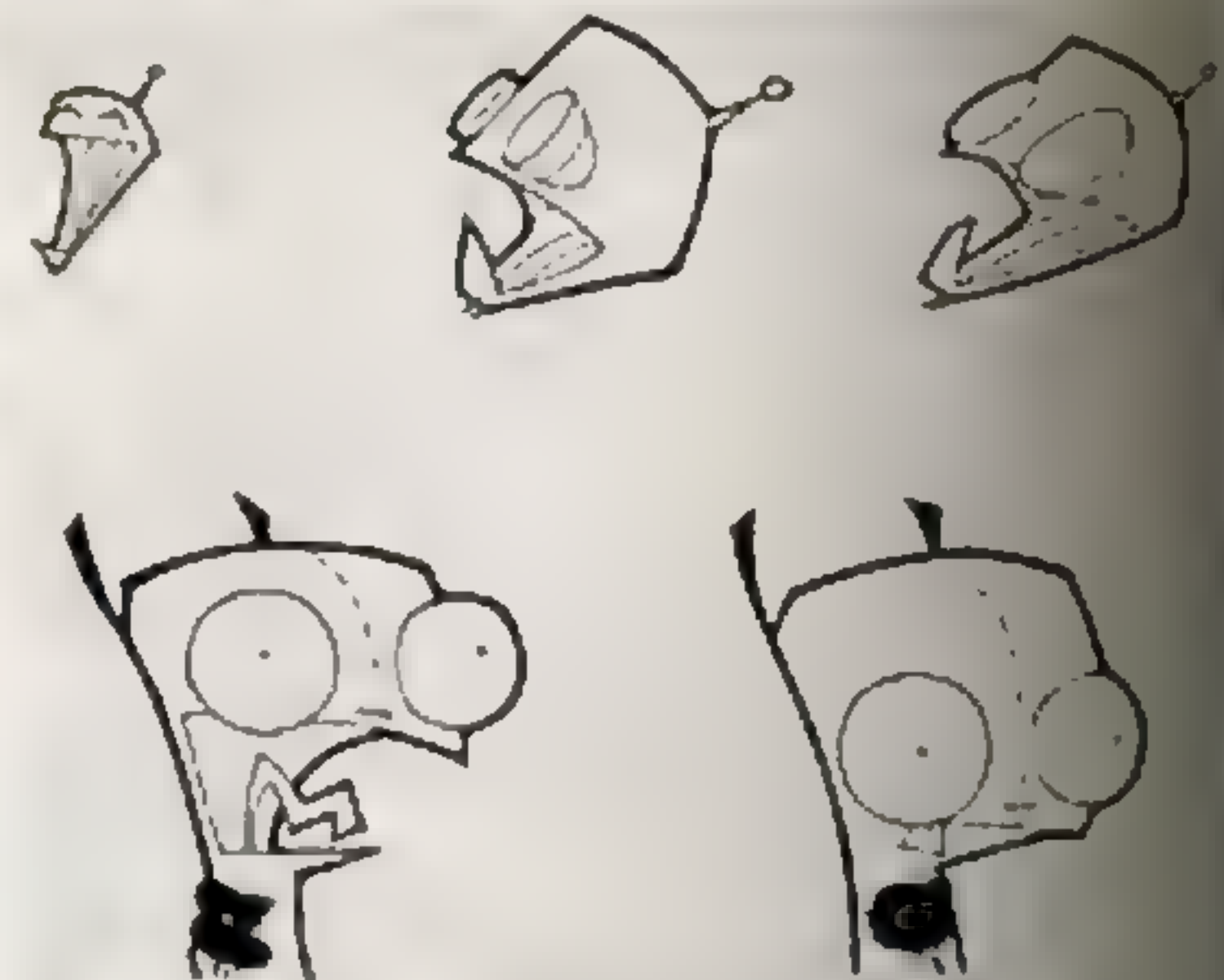
**Bryan Konietzko (storyboard artist, art director):** I think Gir was my favorite, possibly because he was the only character who seemed to feel comfortable and at ease in that world—maybe the only one who wasn't suffering. He fully accepted, embraced, embodied, and channeled the absurdity of it all. I'm guessing Jhonen would say he didn't have a choice because he was a broken, malfunctioning robot.

**Jhonen:** There's been a lot of retconning Gir's origin, because really, he shouldn't work at all. In the first episode we have him just literally made from pocket garbage that the Tallest had, which I think is funny because they don't even have any pockets. They dump a bunch of crap into some robot parts

from the trash and it works. Gir shouldn't really exist, so I always think it's funny when people ask about Gir, because I'm like, "I don't know. Why are you even asking me?" The fact that his eyes go red, that he functions for completely half a second properly is kind of a miracle. So yeah, S R units [Standard-Issue Information Retrieval units assigned to Irken invaders] are supposed to have red eyes, they're supposed to be these little s-dexxas, and every now and again Gir has shades of s-but not about as deep as it goes.



GIR IN RAT-LIKE DISGUISE

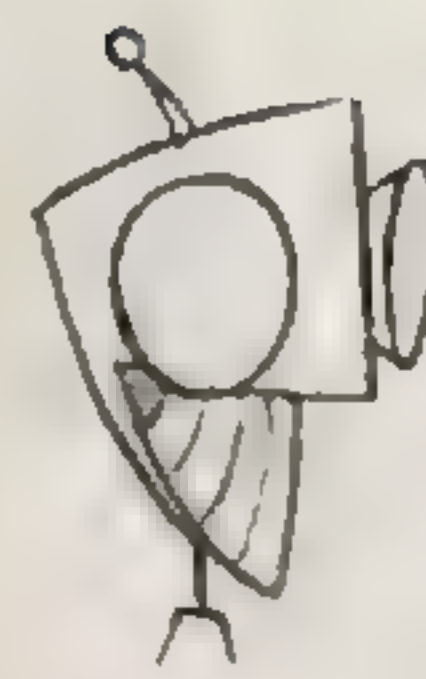
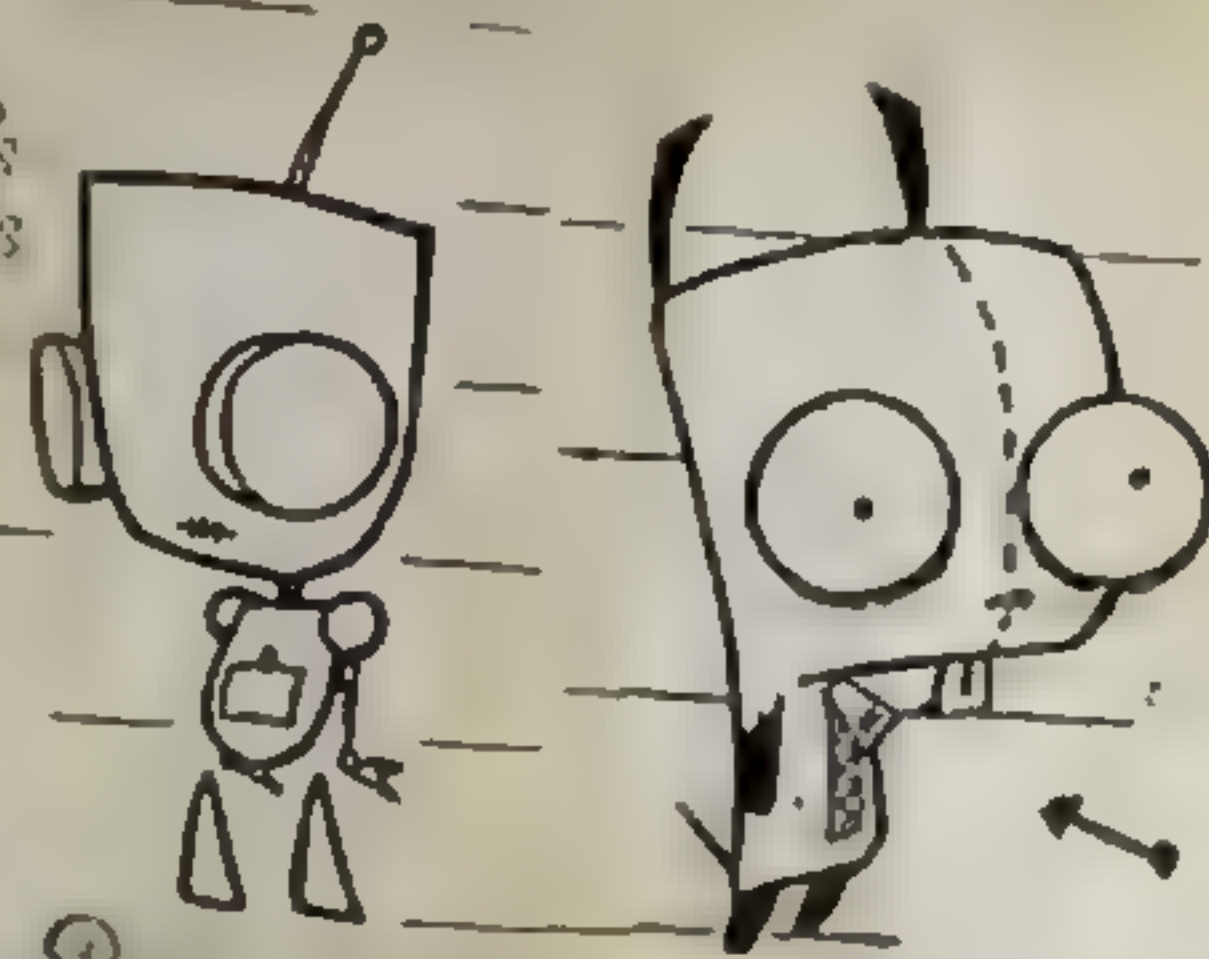
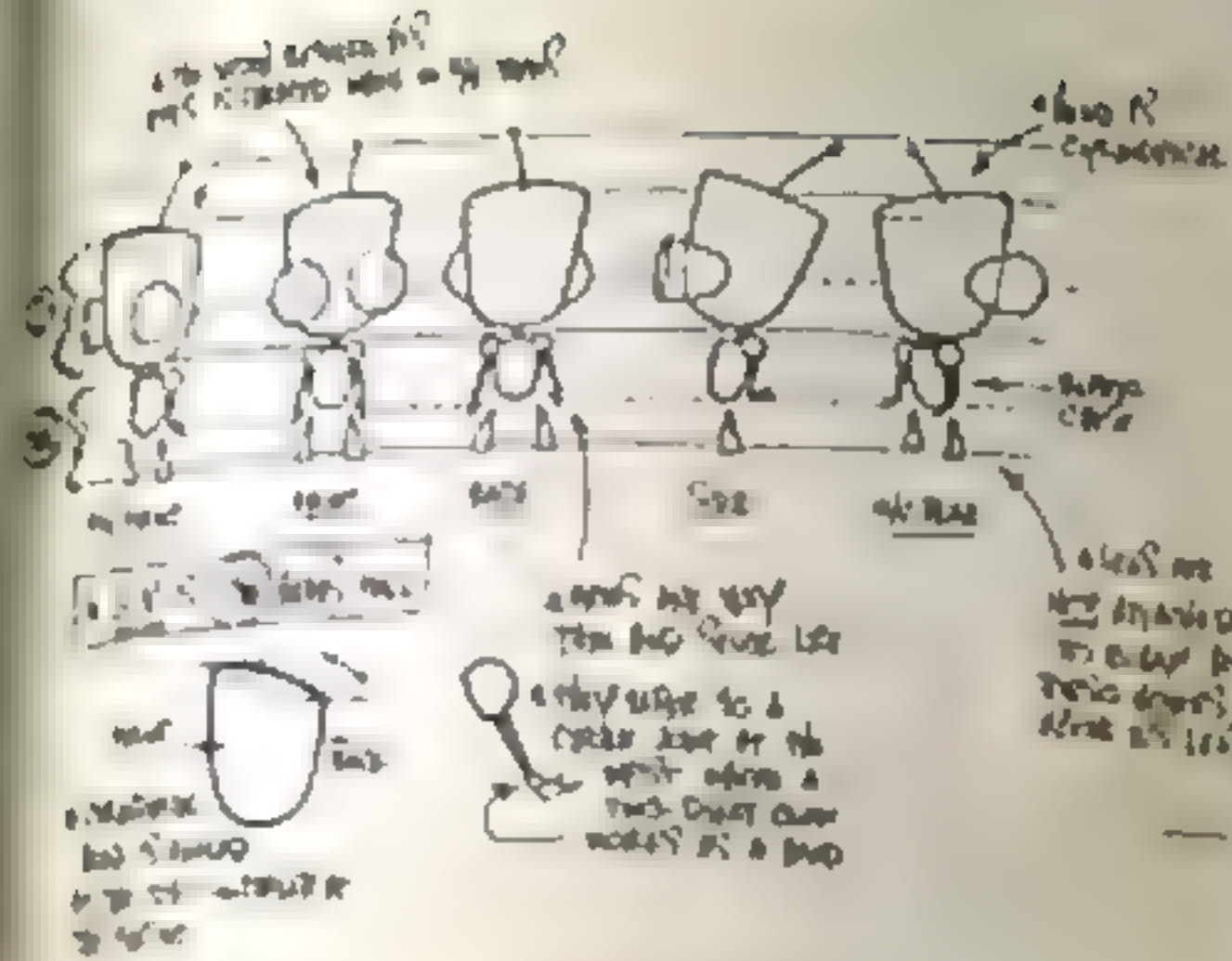


GIR EXPRESSIONS

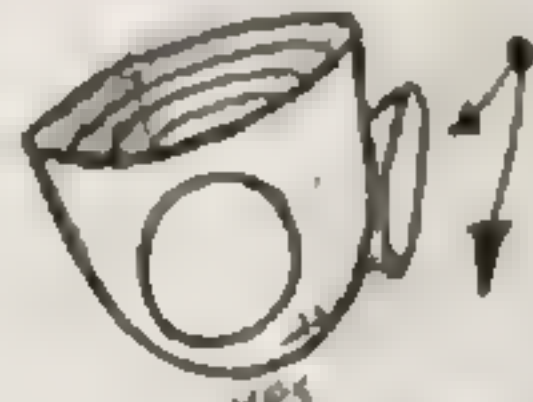


# GIR NOTES

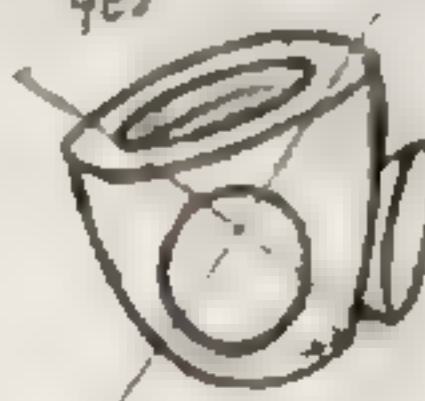
Gir is the silliest character on the show. He is devoted to Zim, but he is also very eccentric and often overly-affectionate. He is clumsy and kind of dim-witted. His actions are often jerky and excitable. He generally looks clueless.



Gir's metallic "skin" is a thin layer...



yes



no

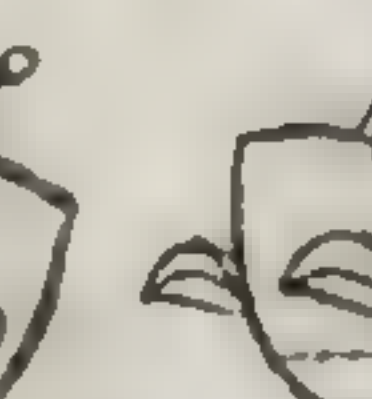
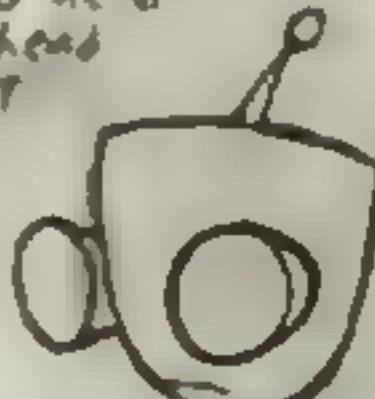
Although Gir has many mechanical functions, his head is like an empty tin can.



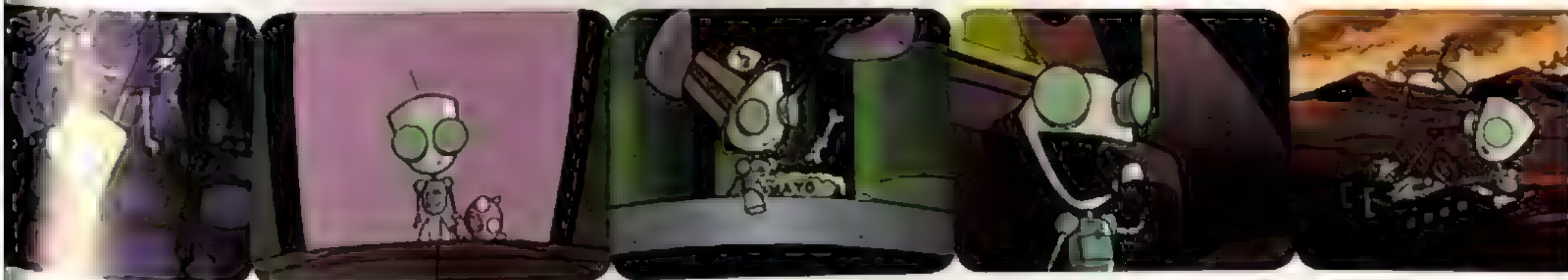
Gir's antennae retracts into head and top of head slides apart



Gir's eyes can extend and retract like telescopes



Gir's eyes can extend and retract like telescopes



This spread: Gir turnarounds, expressions, a model sheet, and various special pose models and sizes.



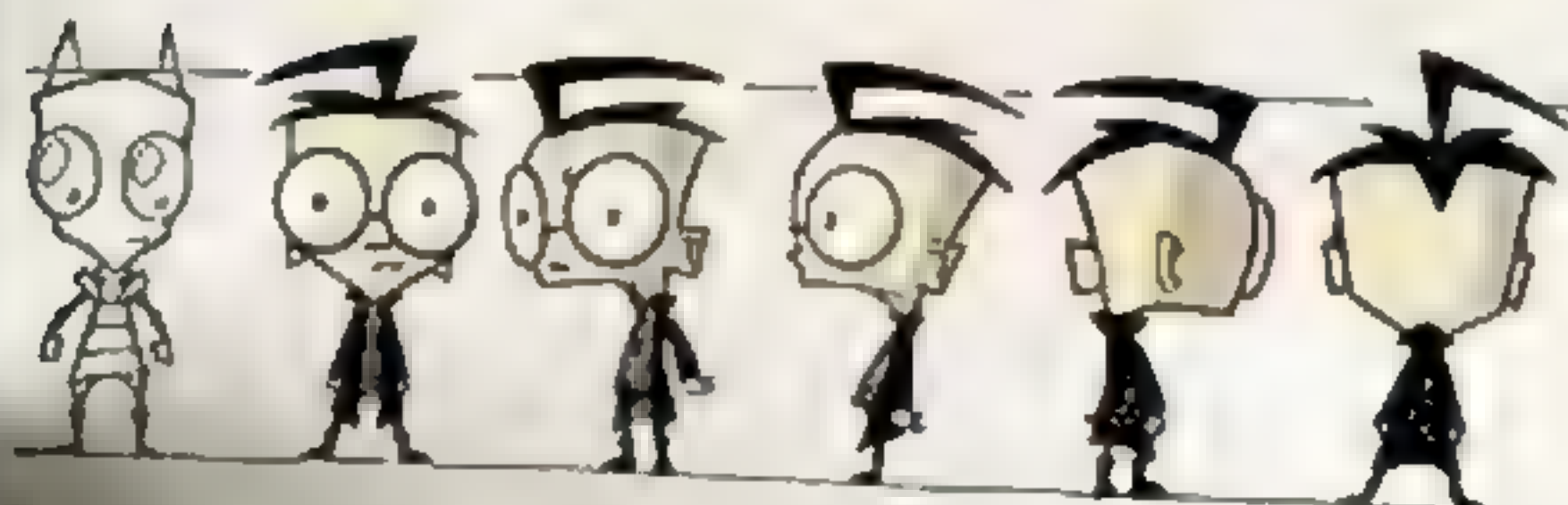
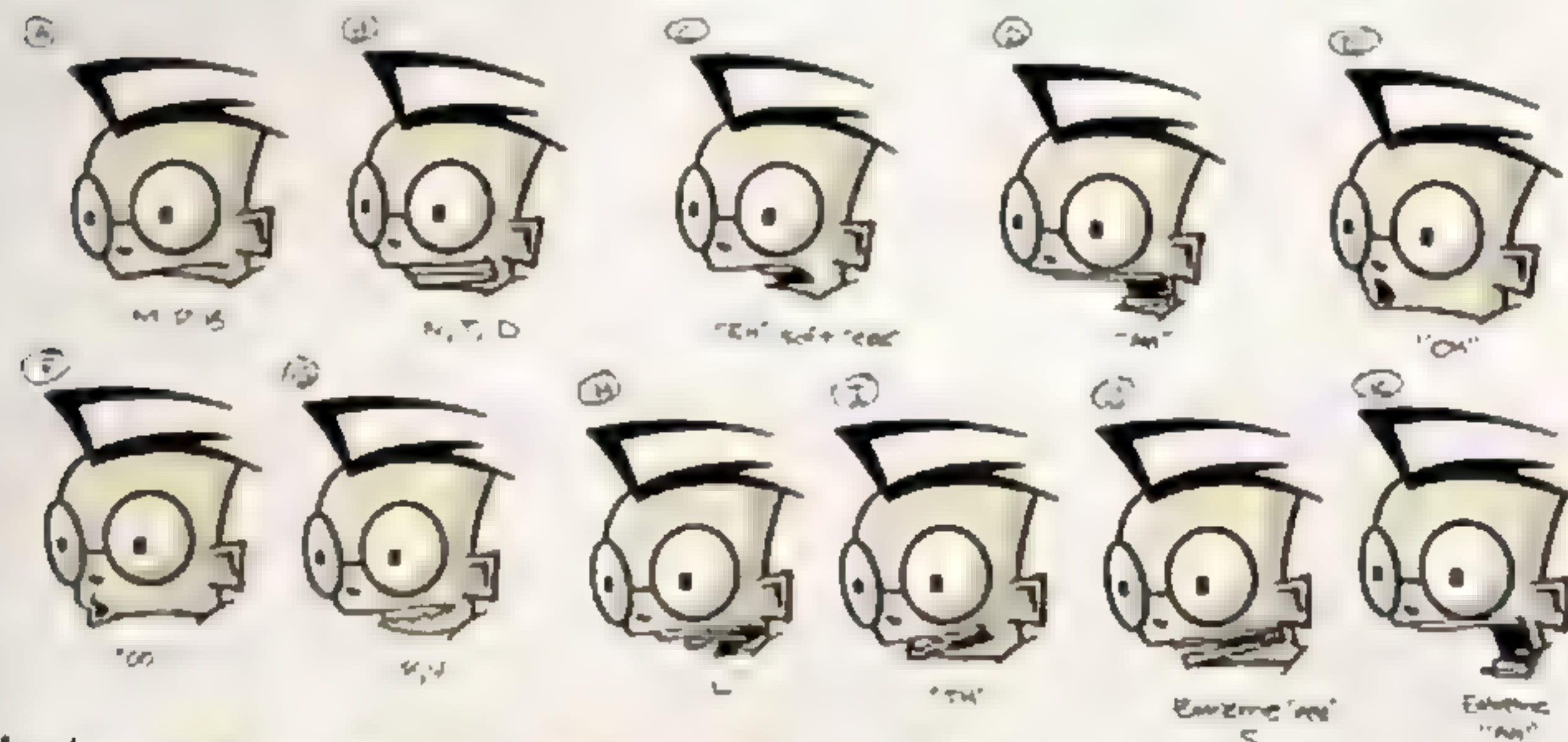
Dib is the conspiracy-theorist, paranormal-investigator child-wiz son of Professor Membrane, the most important, most famous scientist who does real, respectable science-y things on television, no less. Dib's reality is one of almost constant madness... witnessing atrocities executed in broad daylight by Zim and being the only one on Earth who knows (or cares) about them. Worse, Dib's paranormal research is dismissed as a crackpot-stuff by his father and as a rage-inducing annoyance by his sister. Despite this incessant turmoil, Dib manages to focus on his mission to expose Zim and gain the respect of his father. After resigning himself to the fact that no one else around him cares to see the poorly disguised alien in plain sight, Dib focuses instead on containment and torment, and thwarting Zim's plans and everyday existence like a schoolyard bully for aliens.

**Rikki:** Dib cares so much about what people think about him. I think with Dib, it's more so not actually

about saving the planet, but about proving to everybody that he's someone that people should respect. I think teenagers—especially young teens—can really connect with that when they're seeking respect and they don't have any. You're completely powerless as a child.

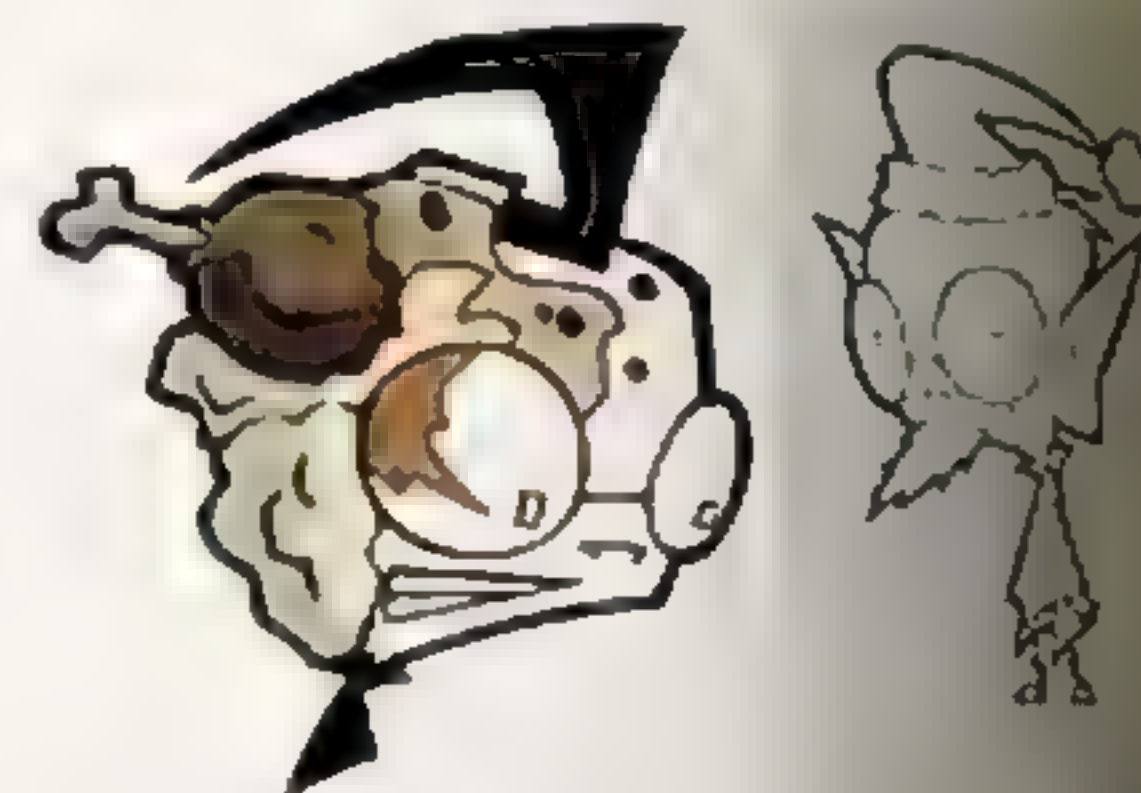
**Eric:** I love Dib because he's one of the only characters with painful sense of how absurd everything is. He's the reality-check in a scene. Except when it comes to his own paranormal obsession, of course.

**Jhonen:** Dib genuinely wants to protect the world and his people despite the fact that nobody believes him. But a good deal of that drive is so that he can then say, "Look everyone, I saved you, praise me!" There's definitely a huge amount of ego that goes into why he does what he does.



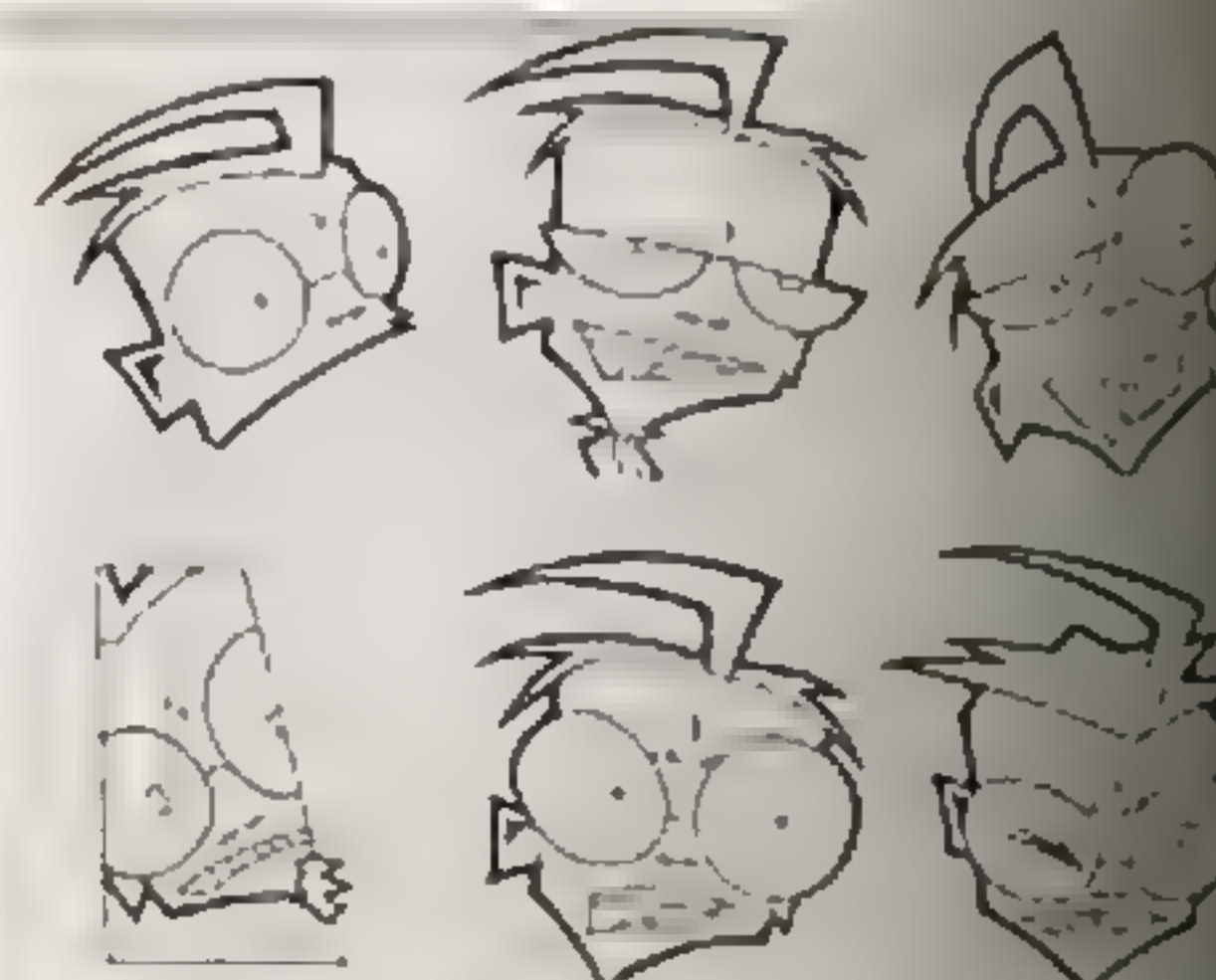
S002 DIB BEAT UP

S003 DIB COVERED IN TIL'



S008 DIB COVERED IN FOOD.

DIB WITH DUMB

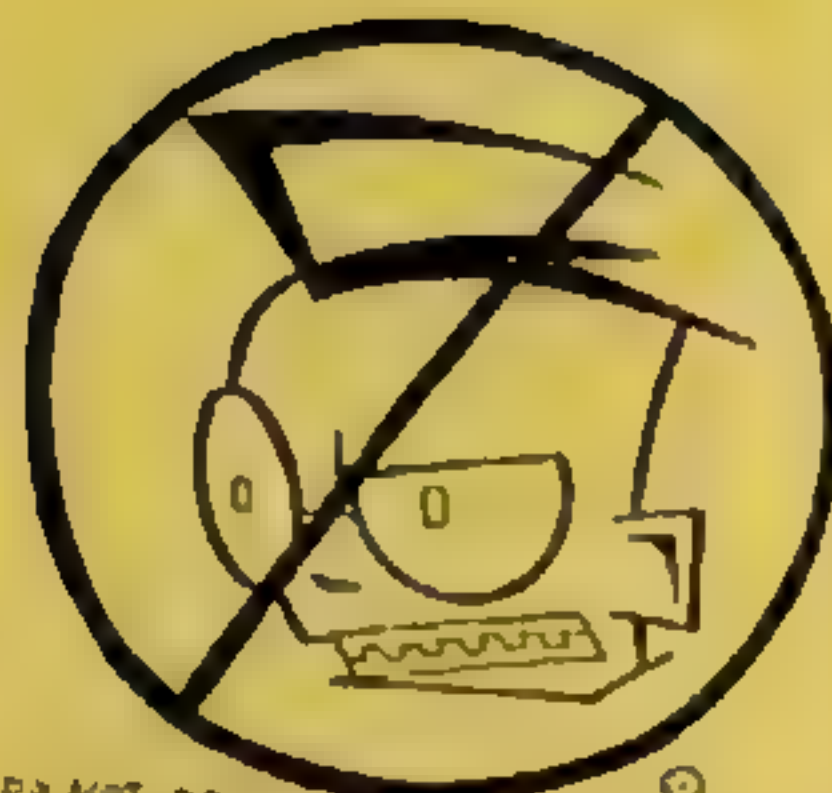


DIB EXPRESSIONS





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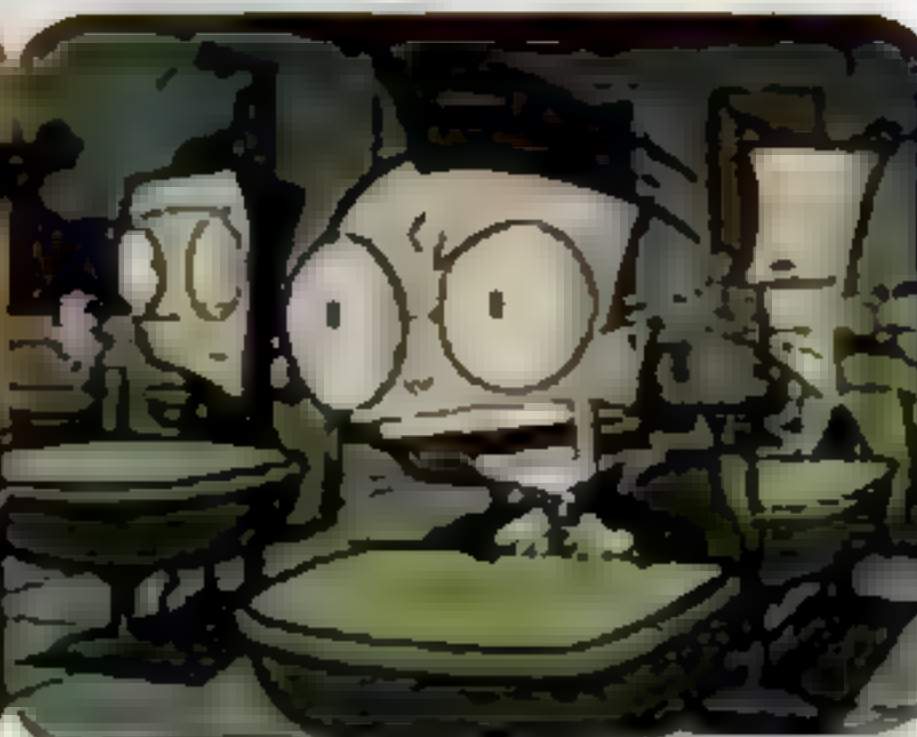
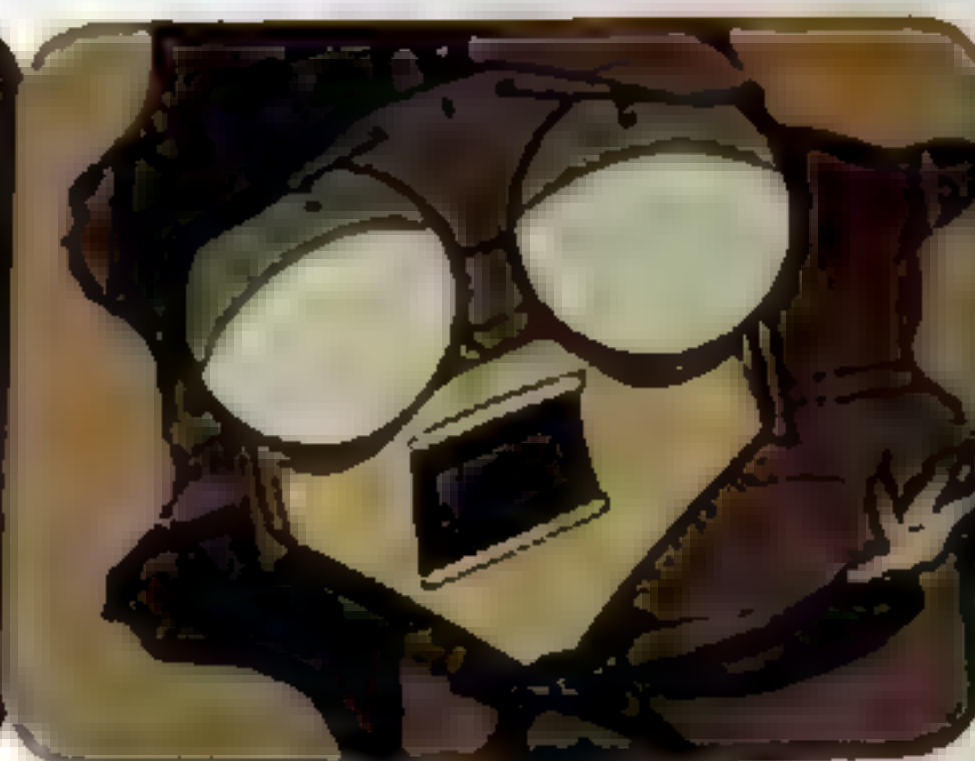
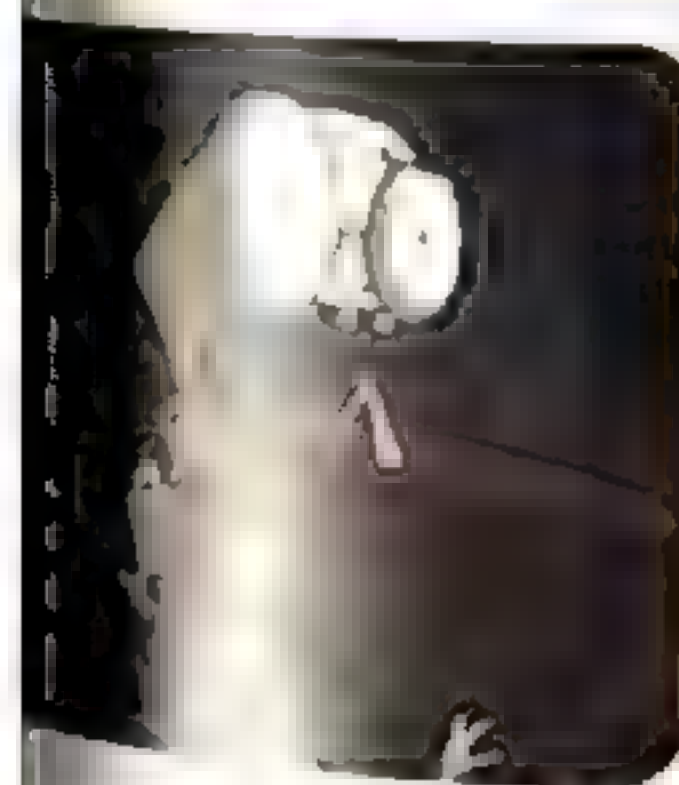
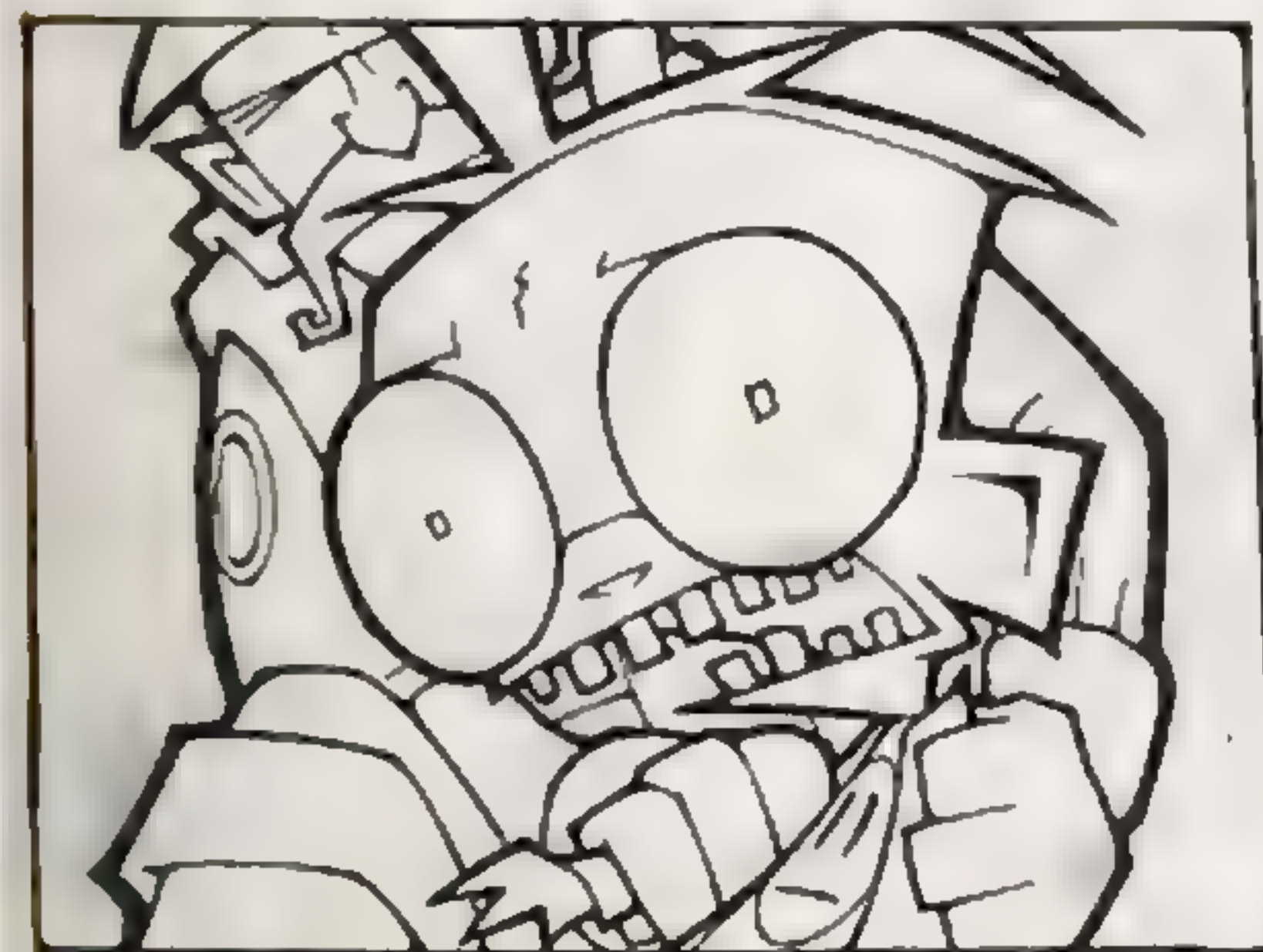
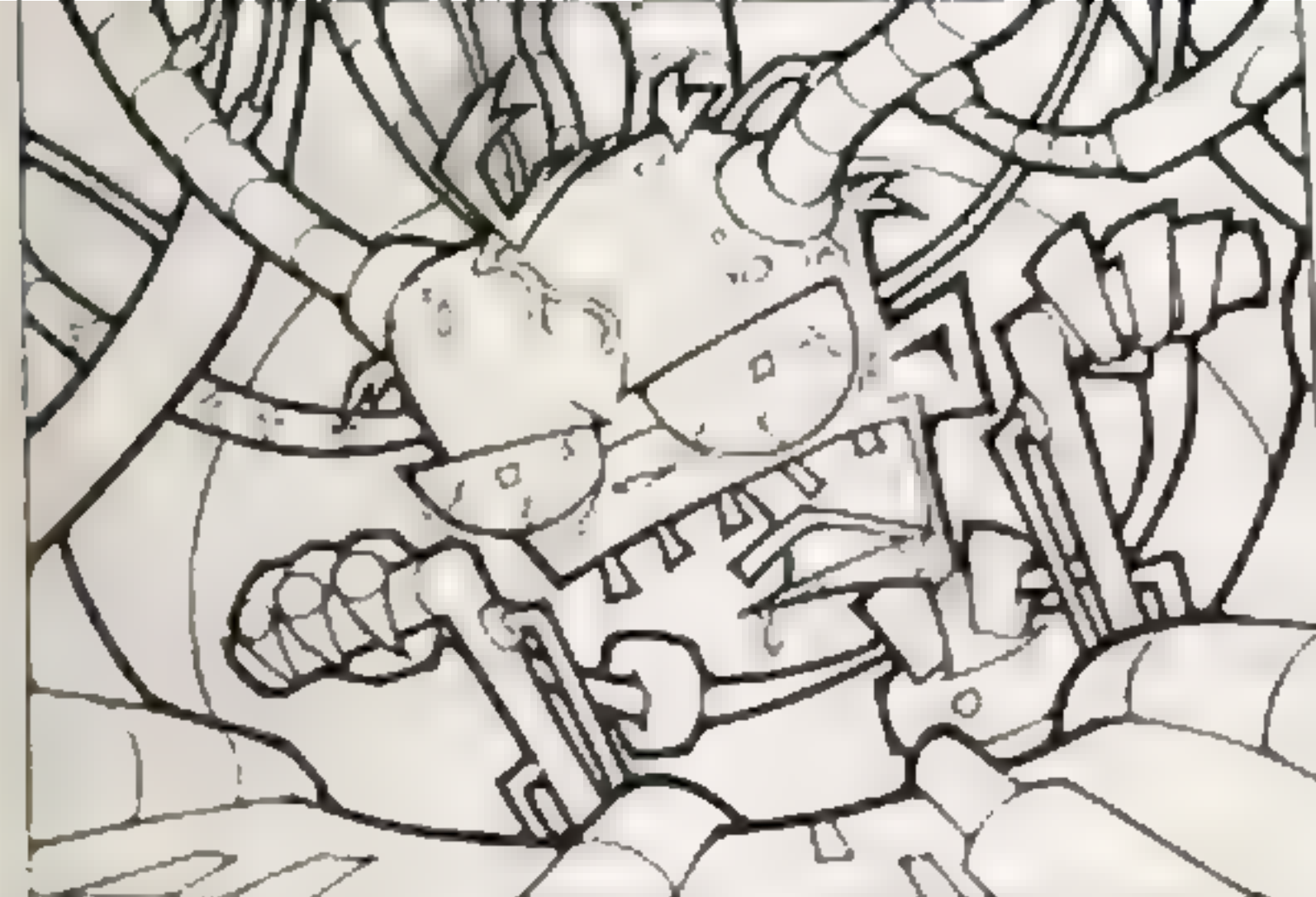
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This spread: Do turnarounds, expressions, some  
doe and don'ts guidelines, storyboard panels, and  
various special pose models and stills.



# GAZ

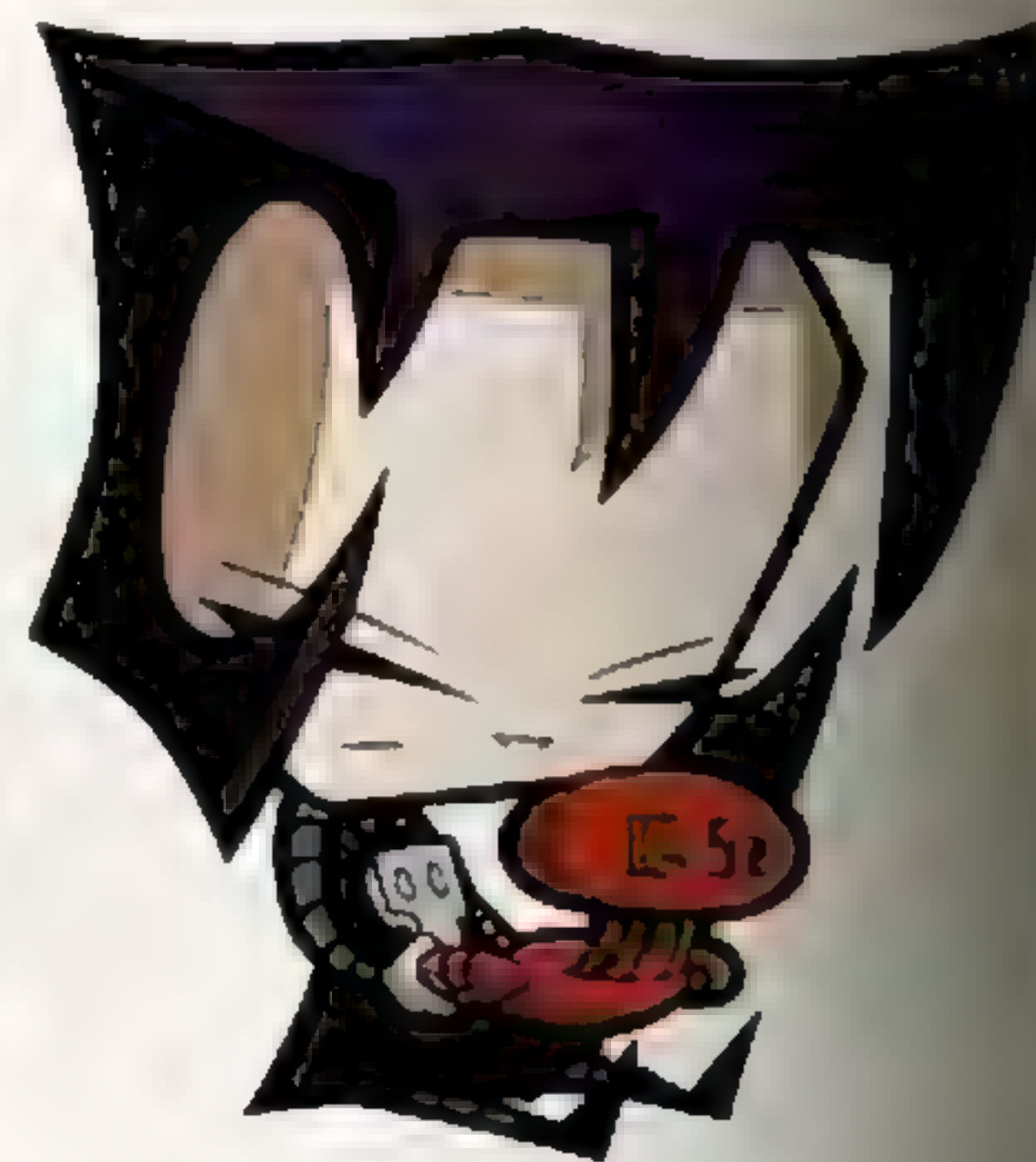
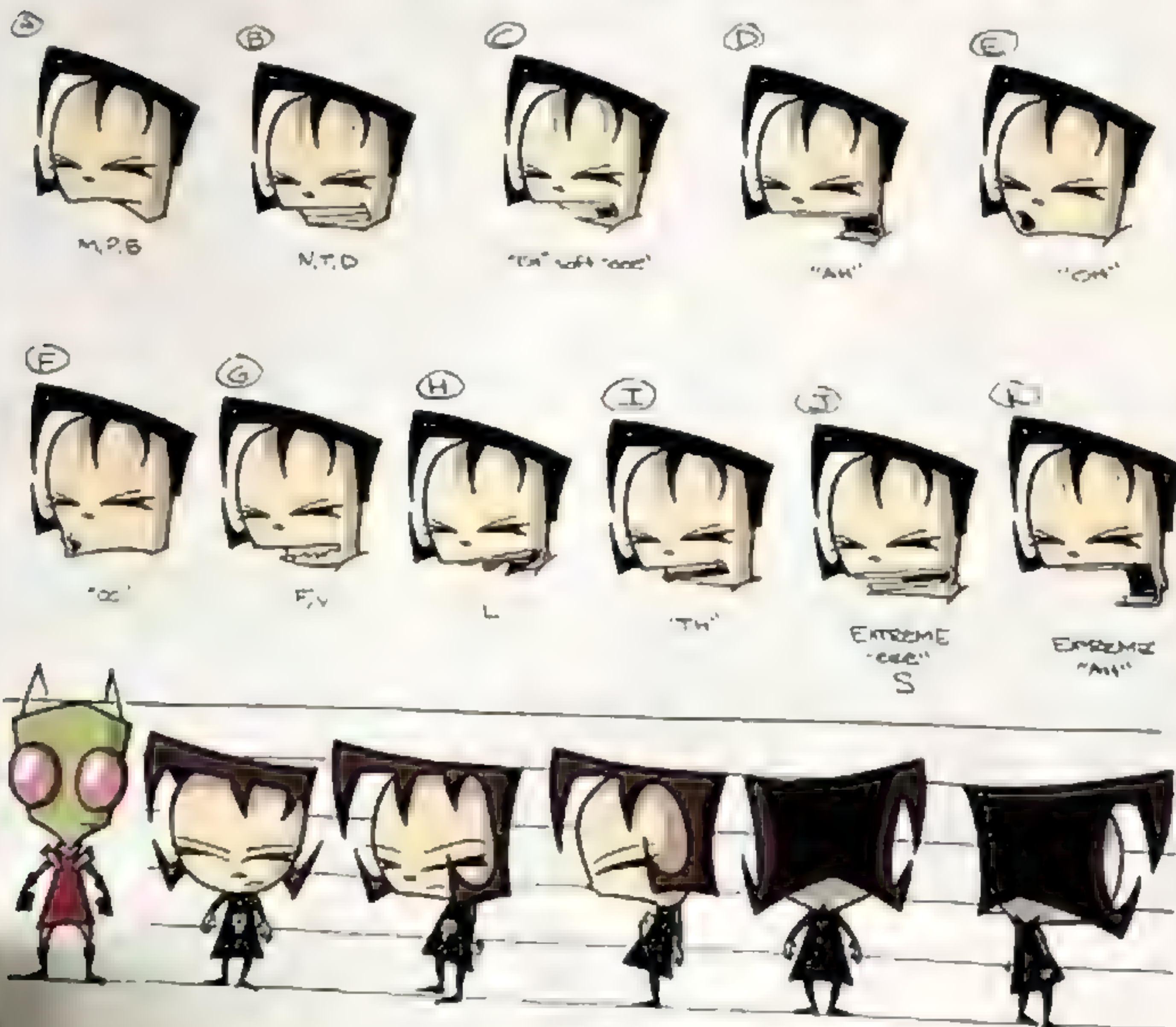
Gaz is a dark and pessimistic gamer, daughter to Membrane, sister to Dib, Sullen, reserved, and hyper-focused on her handheld, Gaz would rather die gaming in a fiery alien-induced apocalypse than have to listen to much more of her brother's paranoid ranting about aliens. Gaz delights in opportunities for vengeance on her brother Dib, as payback for enduring a lifetime of his absurd experiments. Gaz also likes to toy with Zim's paranoia, well aware that he is an alien, and easy to trigger. Gaz appreciates the little family time that the Membranes get to share, especially when it involves

pizza or weenies, but she is not as desperate for her father's approval as Dib, and can contentedly pass the time creating creepy art in her spooky bedroom.

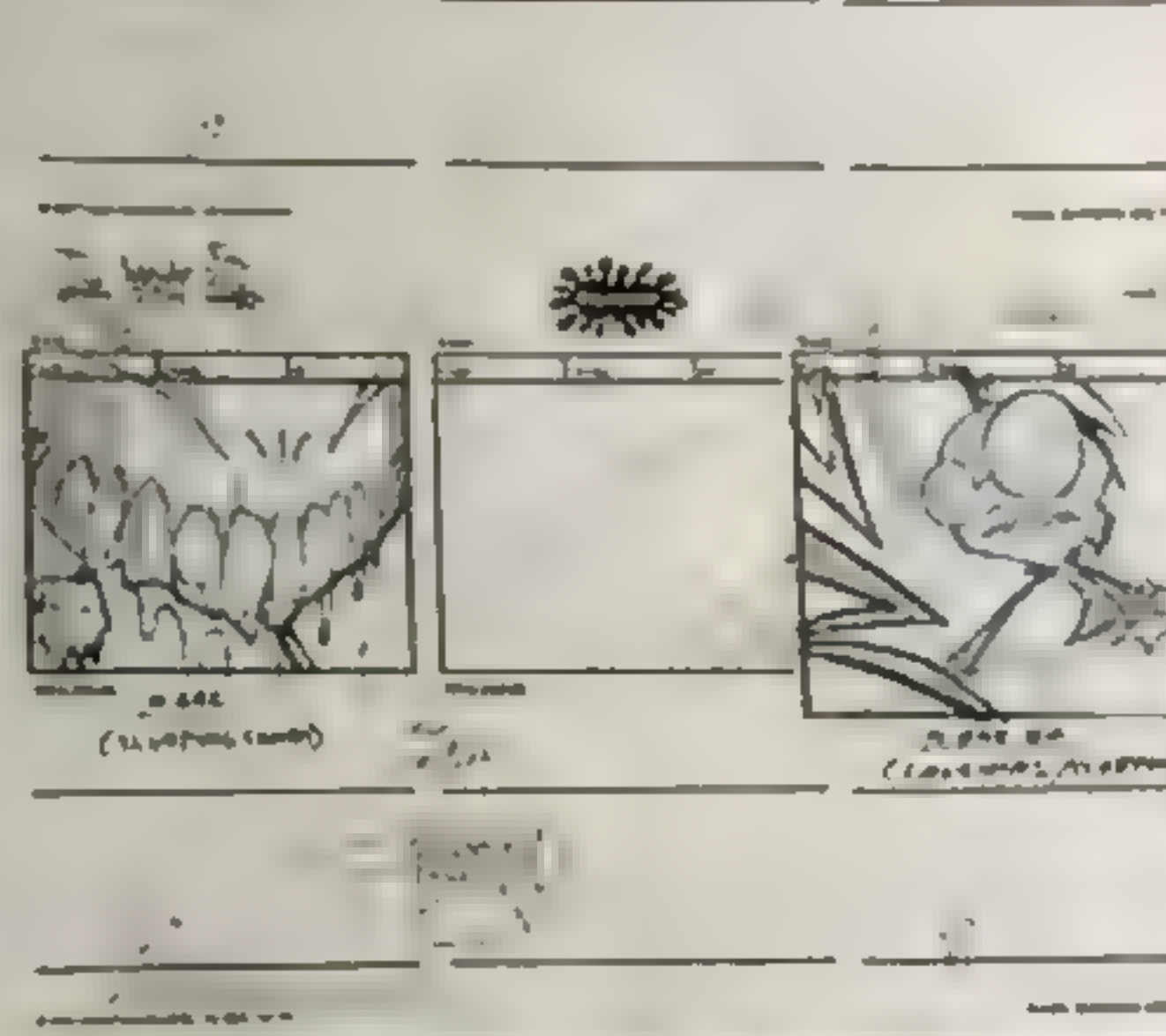
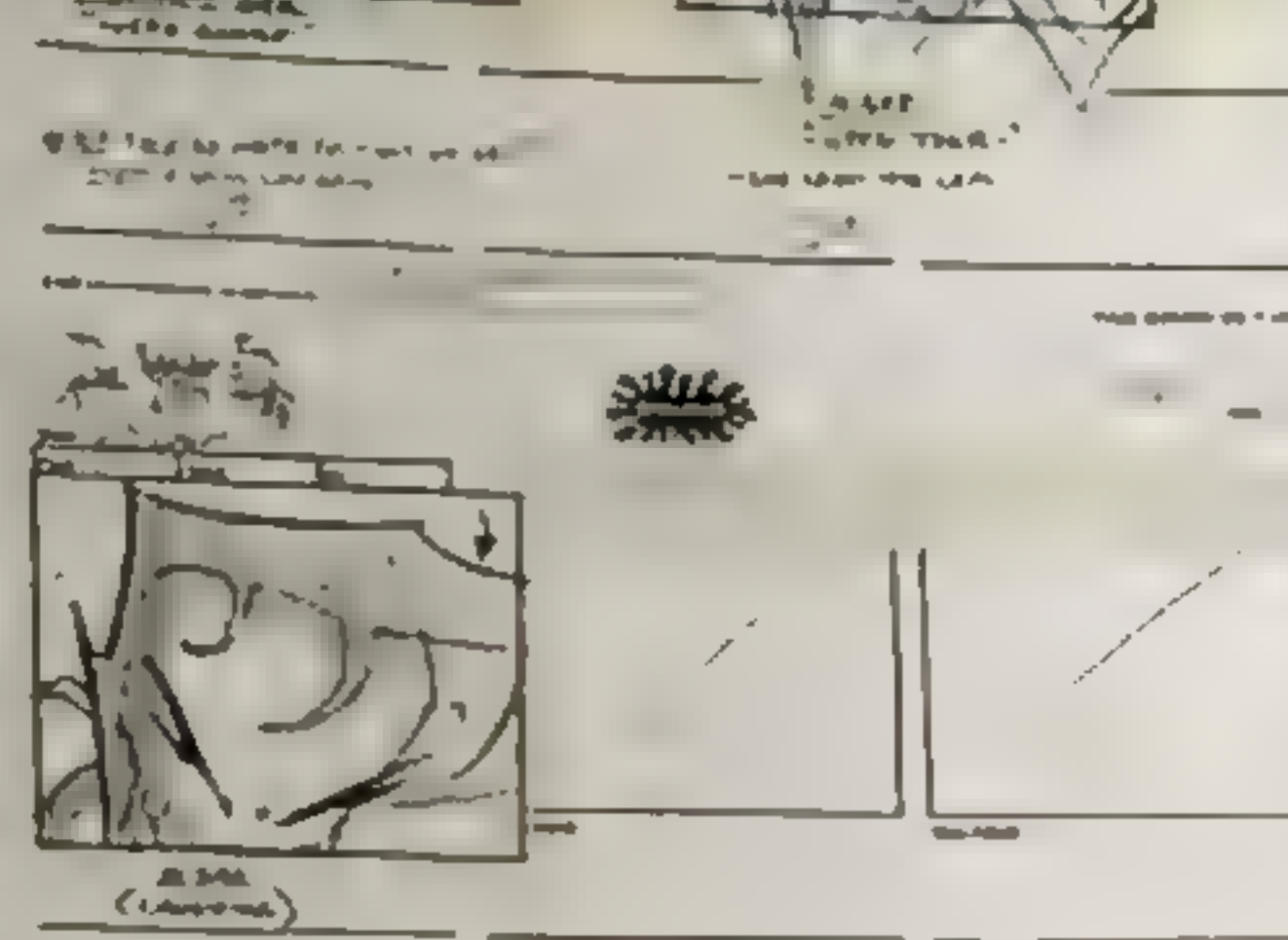
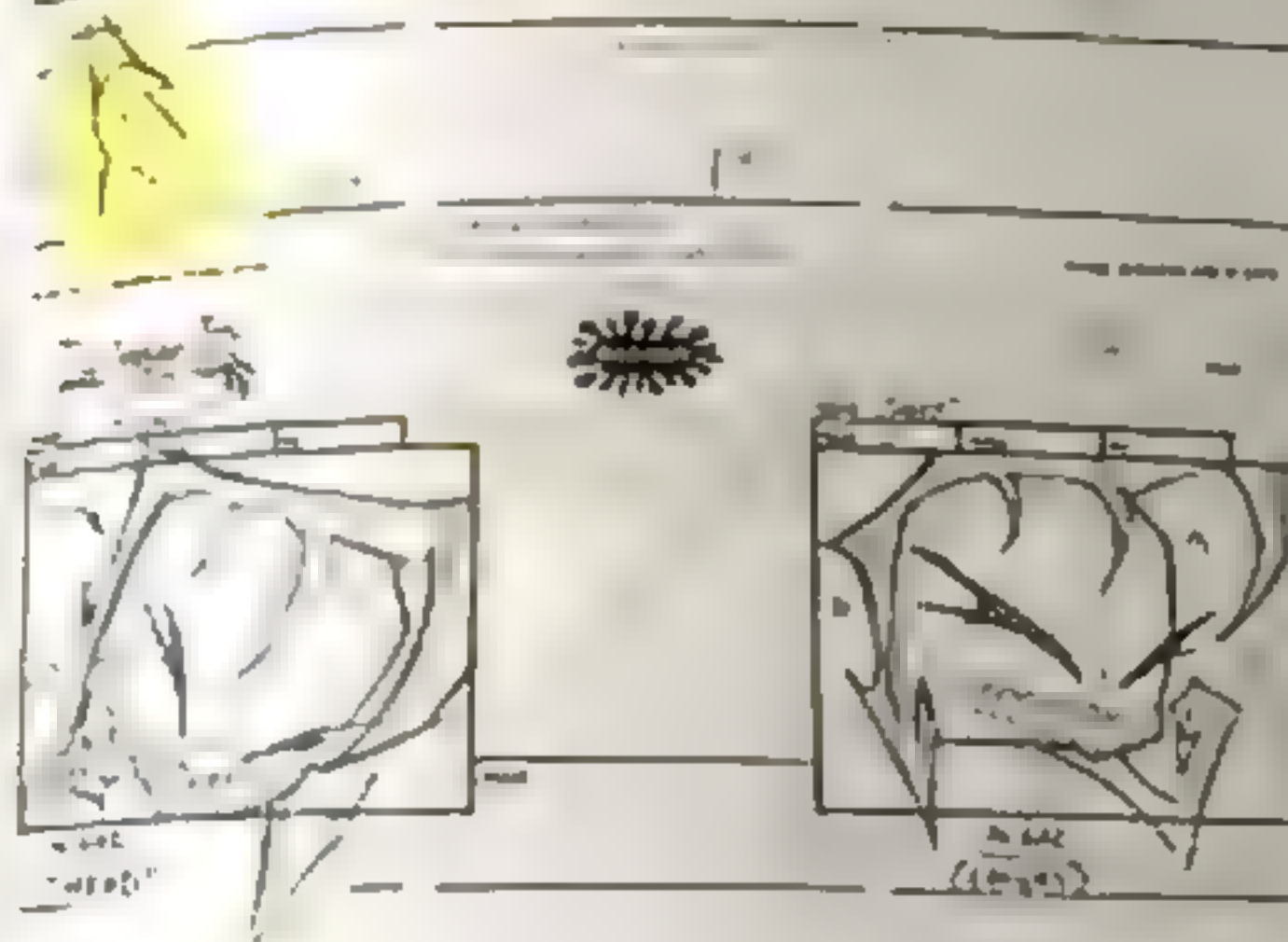
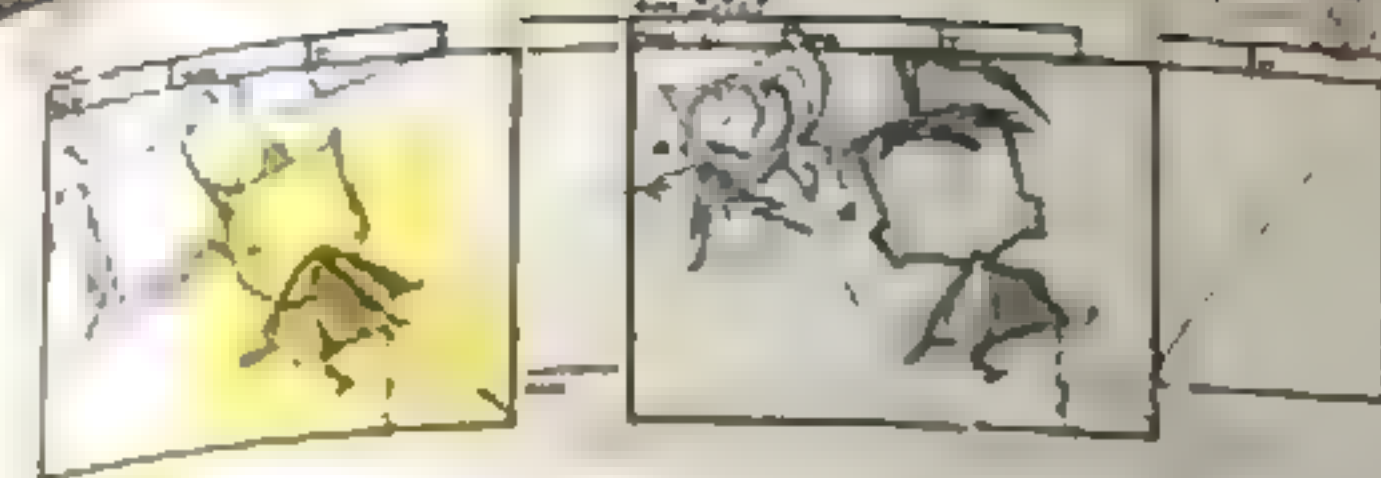
**Eric:** I always assumed that deep down Gaz's attitude was a coping mechanism for how messed-up her home life really was. Absent dad, crazy brother, mysteriously unmentioned mother, etc. I don't know if anyone else thought this way. Gaz's character could walk a line between horrible and sympathetic, so you had to be careful not to fall too hard on the horrible side.



SS01 GAZ AS BAT MONSTER







This spread: Gaz furmounds expressions, storyboards, and various special pose models and stils.



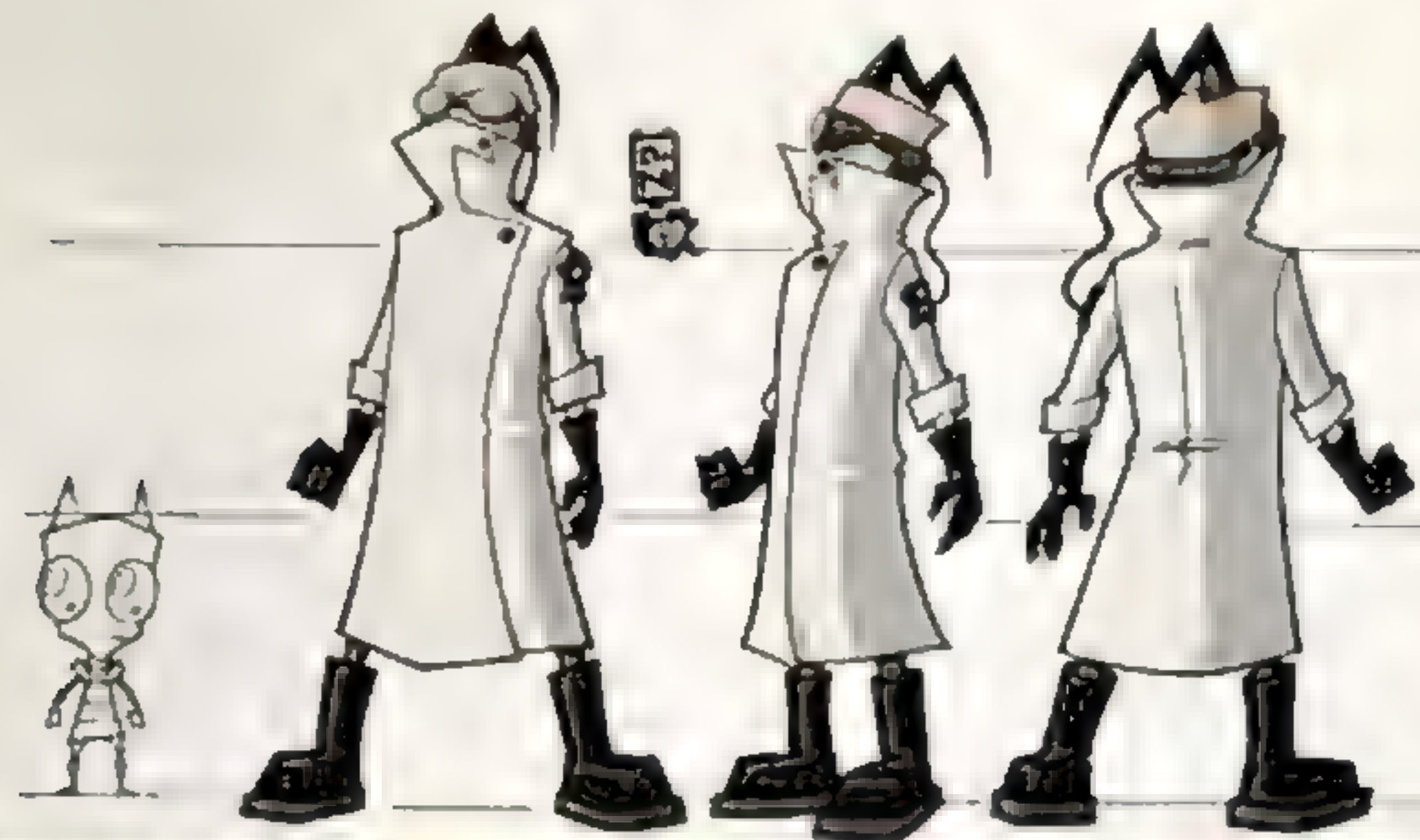
# PROFESSOR MEMBRANE

Professor Membrane is the reality-TV scientist of tomorrow. Completely preoccupied with his work, and being a science superstar on his show *Probing the Membrane of Science*, Membrane's children largely have to take care of themselves around the house without him. Beyond shelter, Professor Membrane also provides food, and in the spirit of family togetherness makes sure to schedule in a once-a-year outing with his children to a reasonably priced local chain restaurant.

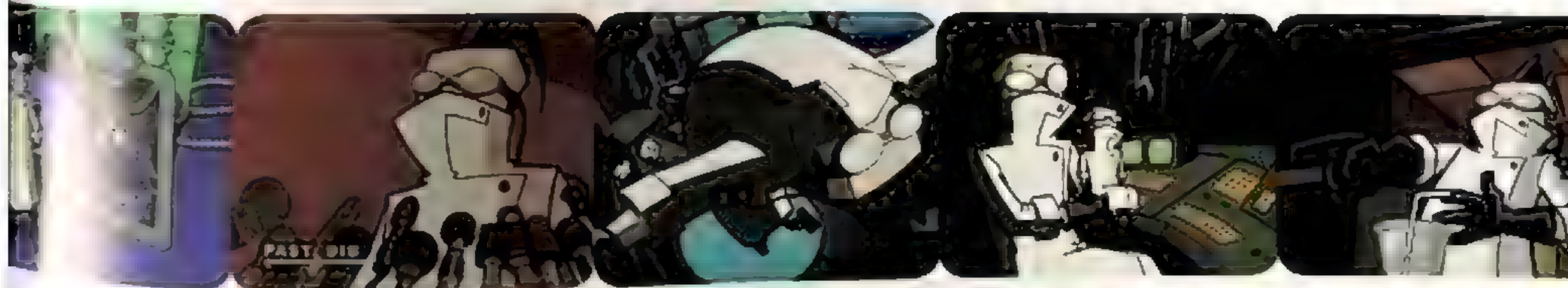
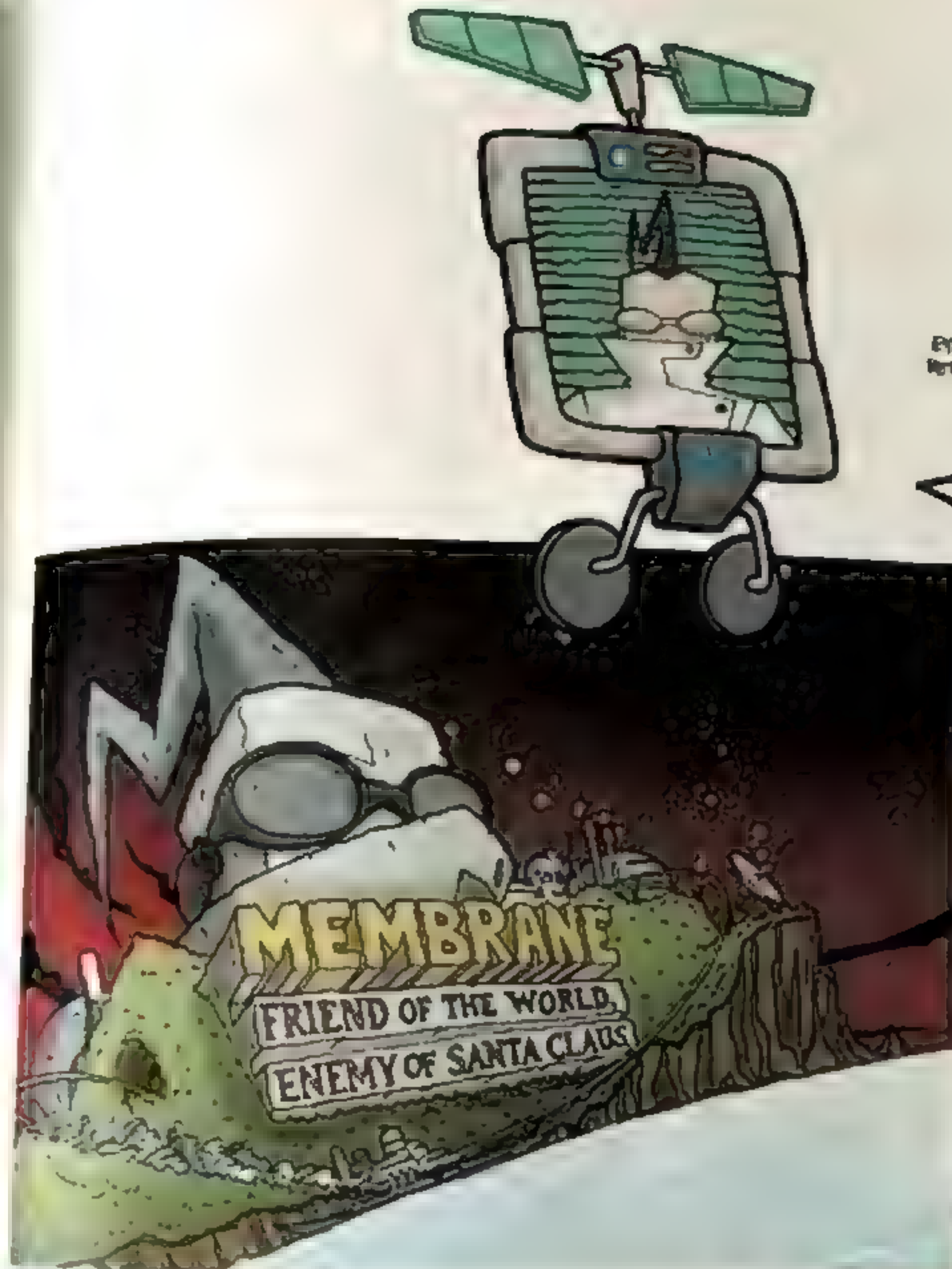
**Jhonen:** The dad in the series is horrible. [laughs] He was present for the kids usually in the form of a

screen, or recorded messages. He didn't act like a dad so much as a man that lived in the house and that fed those children.

**Eric:** I loved how Professor Membrane could be over-the-top dramatic. If I could come up with a line that would end with him posing majestically, I would be happy for days. OK, maybe only hours. "I've never trusted that jolly fat man!" is one of my favorite Membrane moments. The idea that Membrane has held an active, life-long suspicion of Santa Claus is hilarious to me.







This spread: Professor Marmbrane turnarounds and various special pose models and skills.

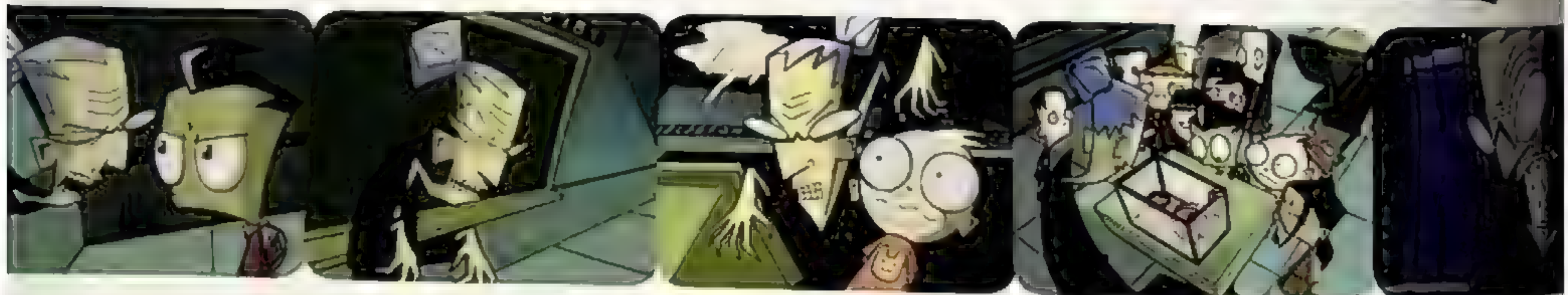
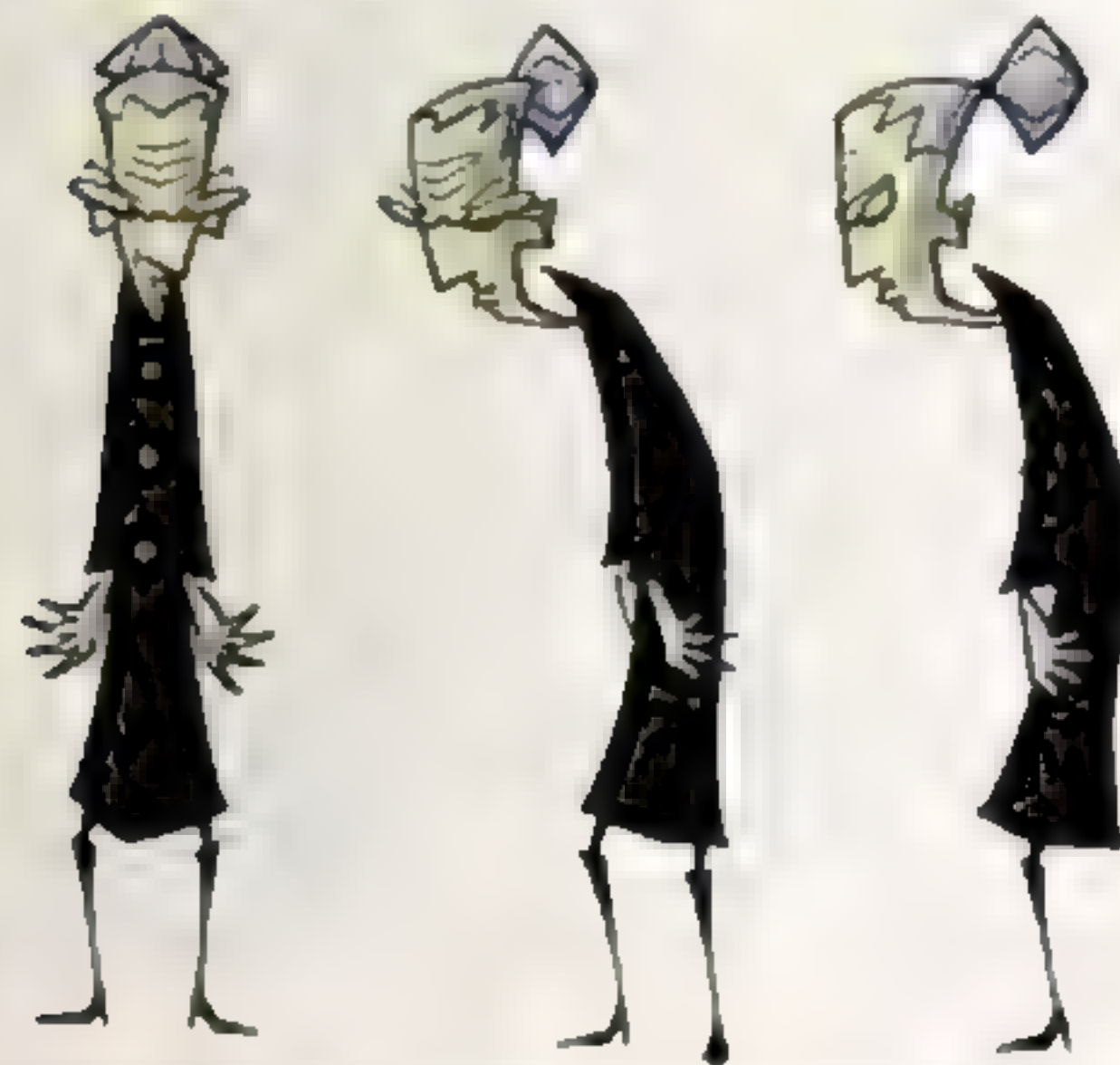


# MS. BITTERS

Ms. Bitters is an inexplicable slithering presence at Skool, and Zim and Dib's classroom teacher. Ms. Bitters excels at squashing any childhood joy from her pupils with dreary anecdotes about their inevitably soul-crushing futures. Not subject to the natural laws of physics, she is able to flow through the air with an insectine rattling to materialize anywhere a caustic quip about the drudgery of existence is needed most. The moment when Ms. Bitters shows off the new class pet, Peepi the hamster, who is running in place in a hamster wheel ("Hamstergeddon" (S1EP9B)) encapsulates her character.

**Ms. Bitters:** Take a good look, children. It will prepare you for your adult lives in our nightmarish corporate system.

**Bryan:** Ms. Bitters has the line that I think best exemplifies the notion that *Zim* was the vilest show ever made for children: "Children, your performance was miserable. Your parents will all receive phone calls instructing them to love you less now." ["Door to Door" (EP11A)]

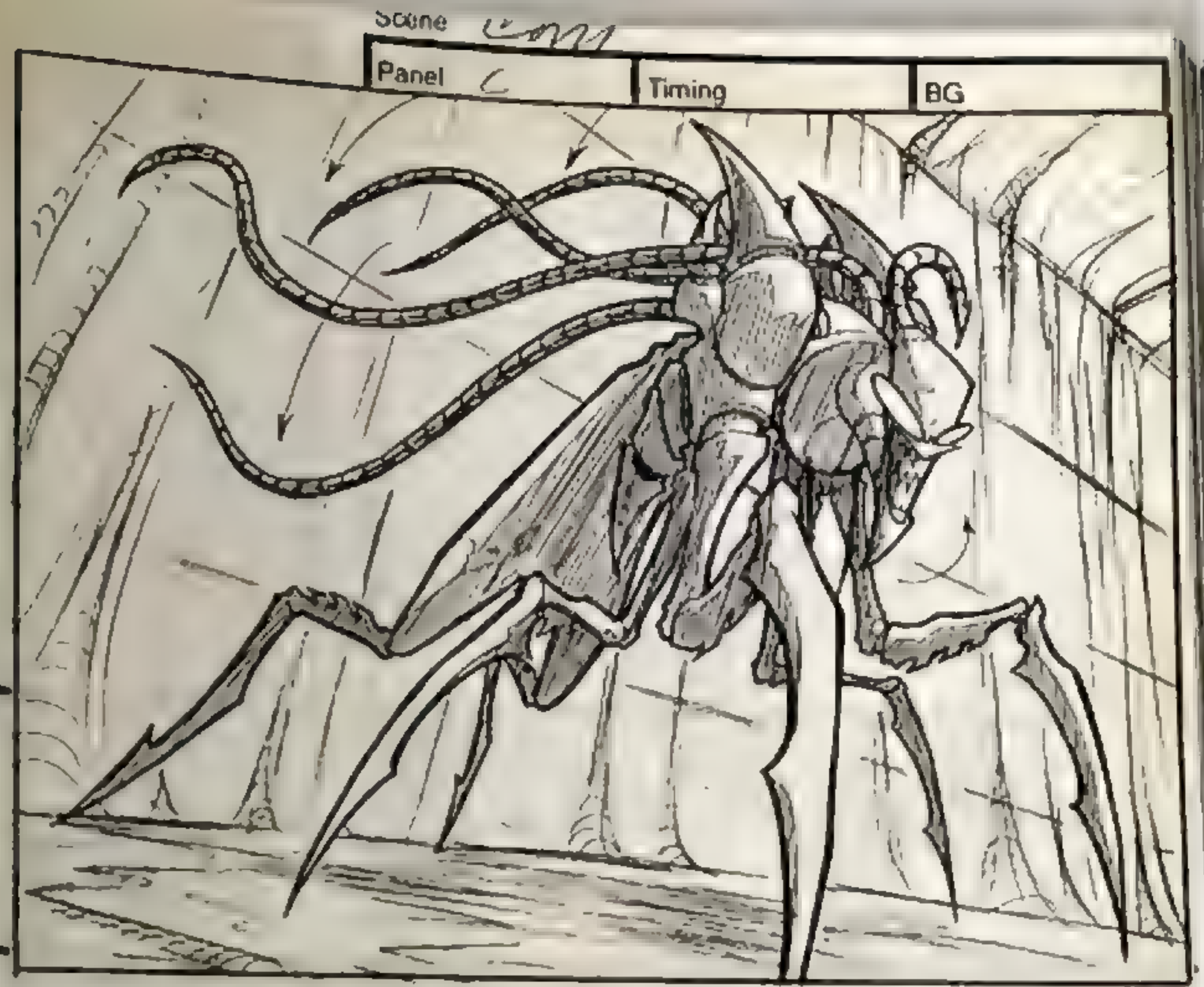


This spread: Some of Ms. Bitters's more unusual forms are featured here in special pose models.

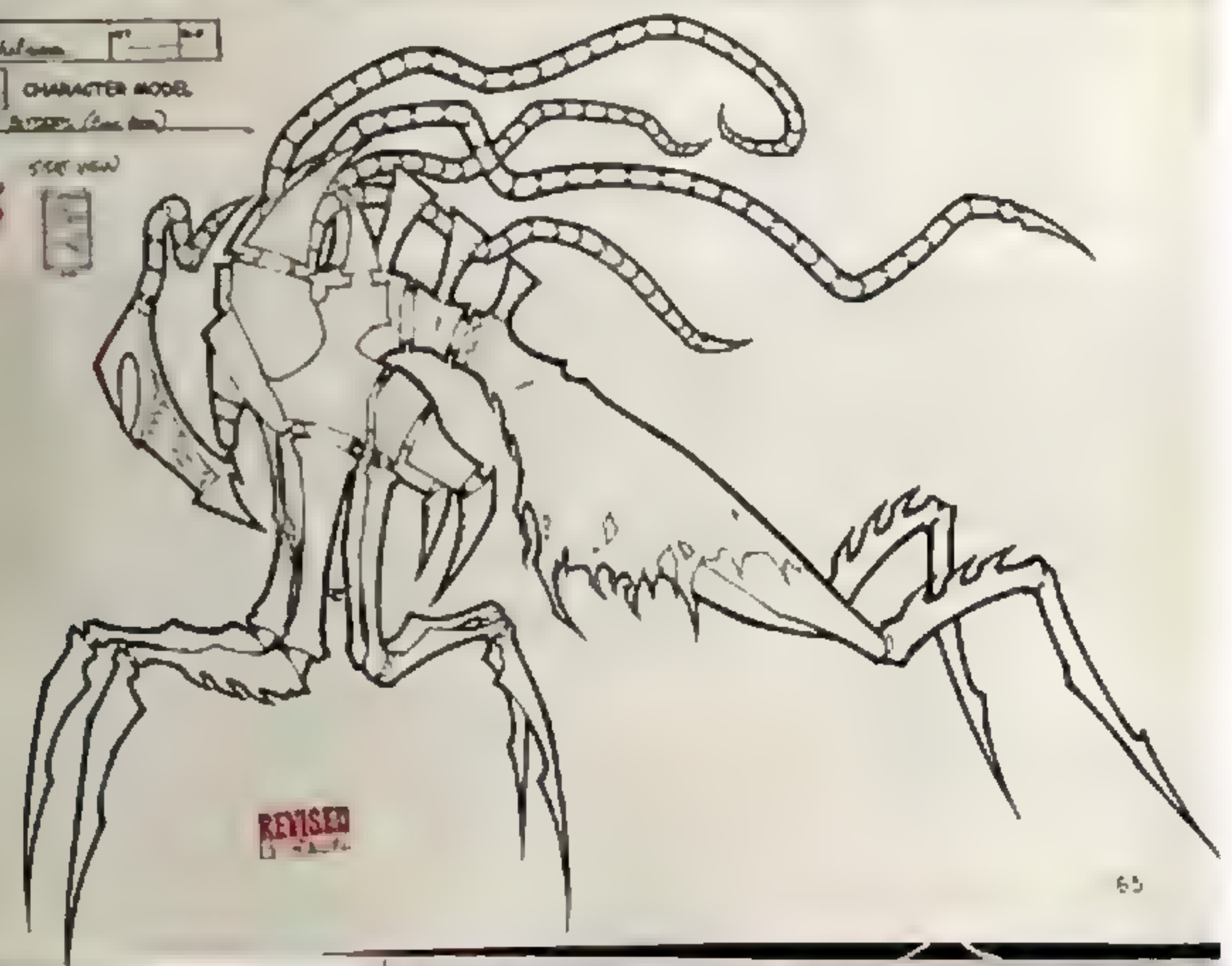
such as Nightmare Bitters from the episode "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14)







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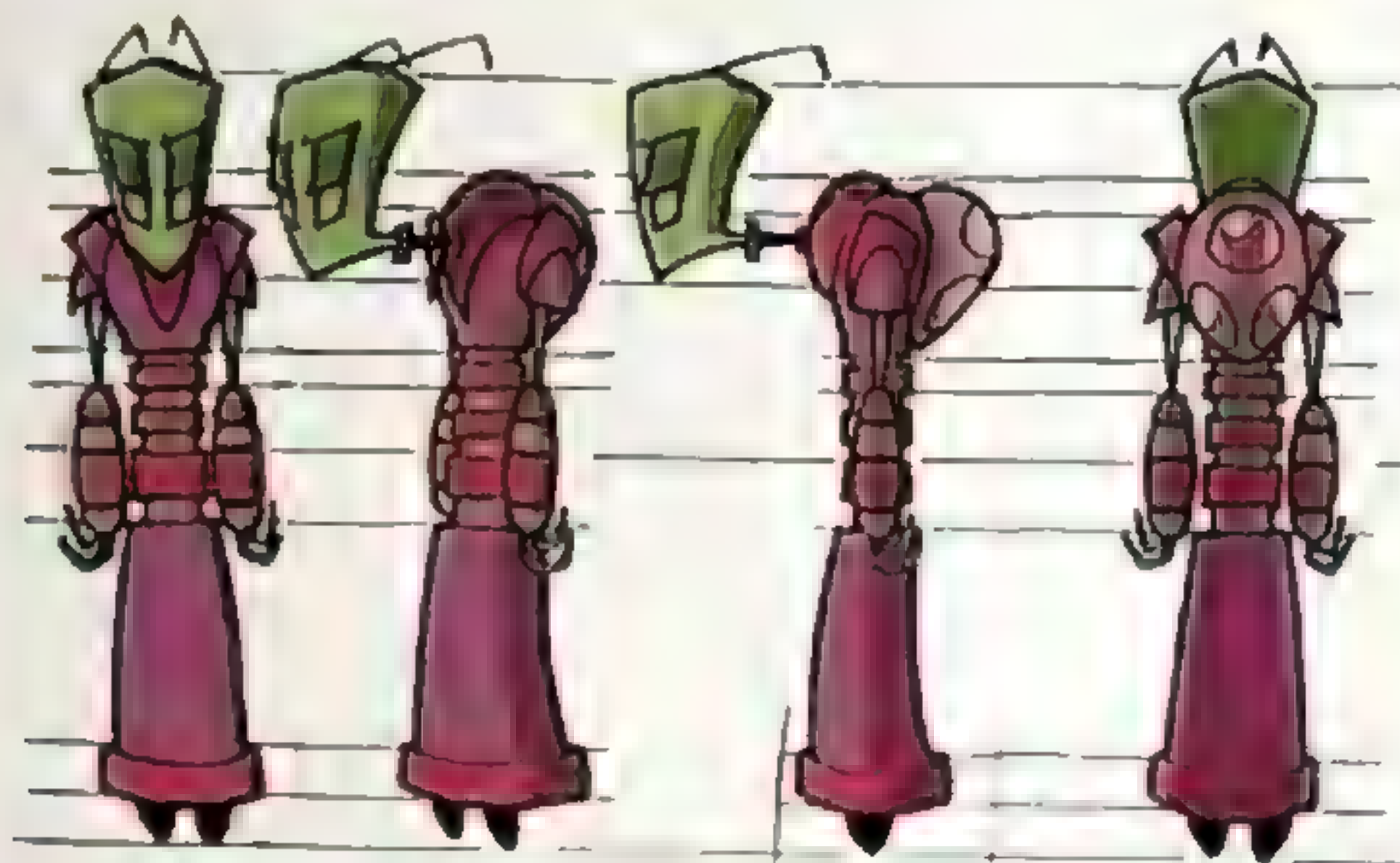


# ALMIGHTY TALLEST & IRKENS

The supreme leaders of the Irken race, the Almighty Tallest are the most vertically gifted of their kind. In a height-based society, this grants them the power to do whatever they want, which is mostly grandstanding and goofing around while their competent underlings do their bidding. One has red eyes and the other has purple, but both share a disdain for Zim.

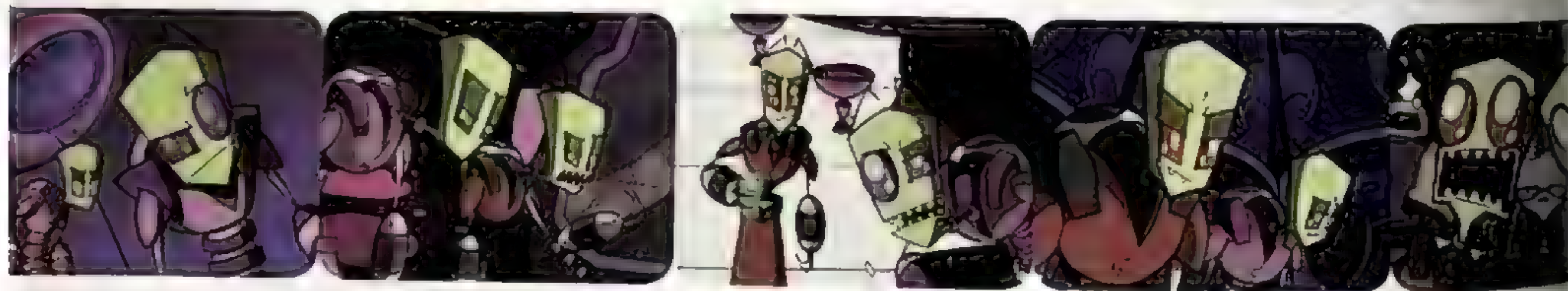
**Jhonen:** When I was coming up with *Invader Zim*, I spent a lot of time thinking about how stupid everything was. [laughs] The Tallest are one of the best

expressions of that—that worth is based on physical appearance, and that your value as a leader is based on your height. I mean, it literally could have been anything, but I went with height, which is as dumb as anything. They're sort of a distant relation to these two aliens that I would draw before, and I thought they looked good standing next to each other. Then they also sort became like parents, with these two tall people with this tiny little childlike figure, Zim, always looking for approval. They sort of act as very unappreciative parents.



S001 TAK AS HUMAN

S002 TAK'S SIR (AS CAT) CUBITAKS 240



**Above:** Character models for the Almighty Tallest and Tak in her Irken attire and human disguise

**Opposite:** Presents for Tak designs and character models for the Irken Elite soldiers that were set to debut in the unfinished episode "The Trial"

Additional designs are a selection of the cast of extra Irkens who populate the backgrounds and do parts throughout the series.

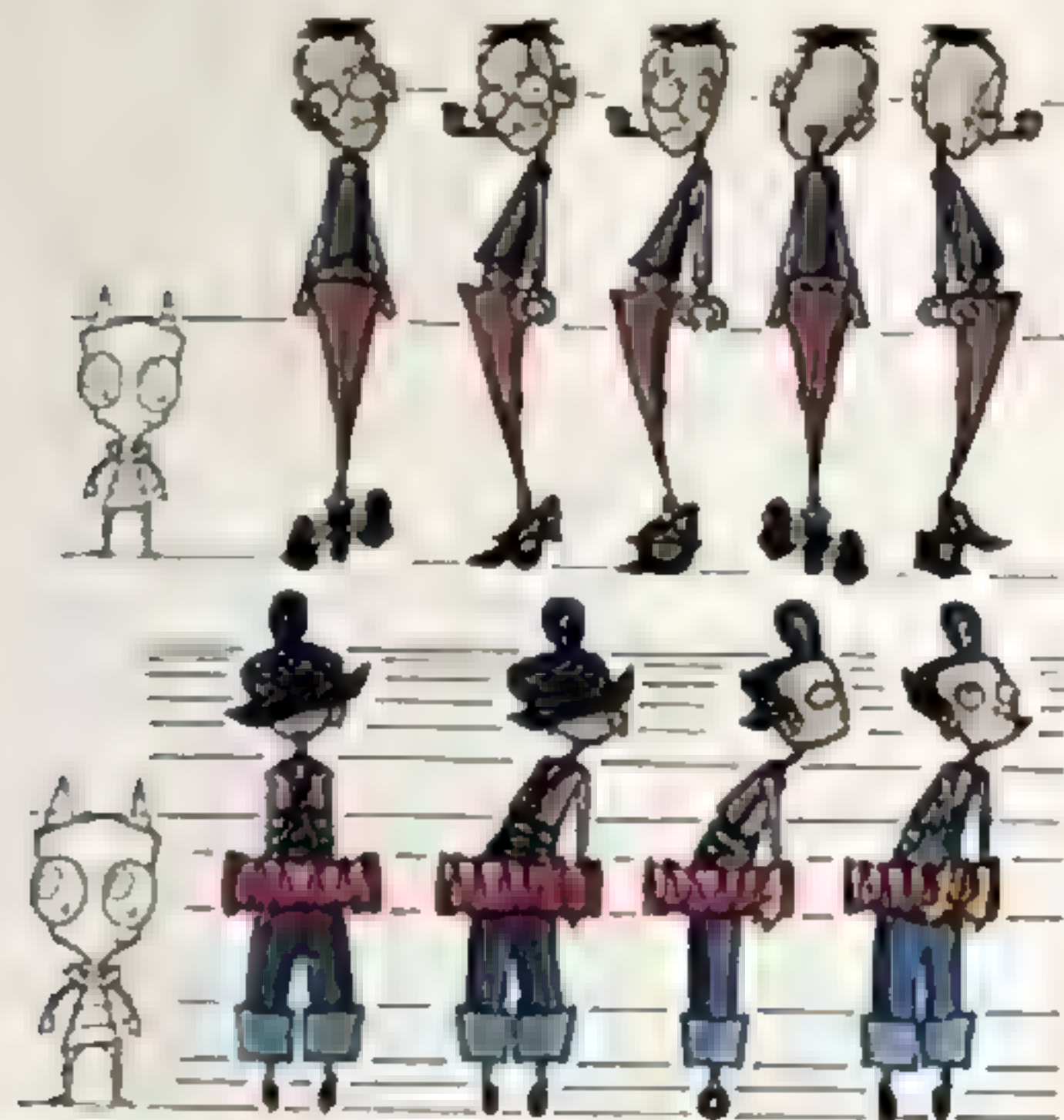




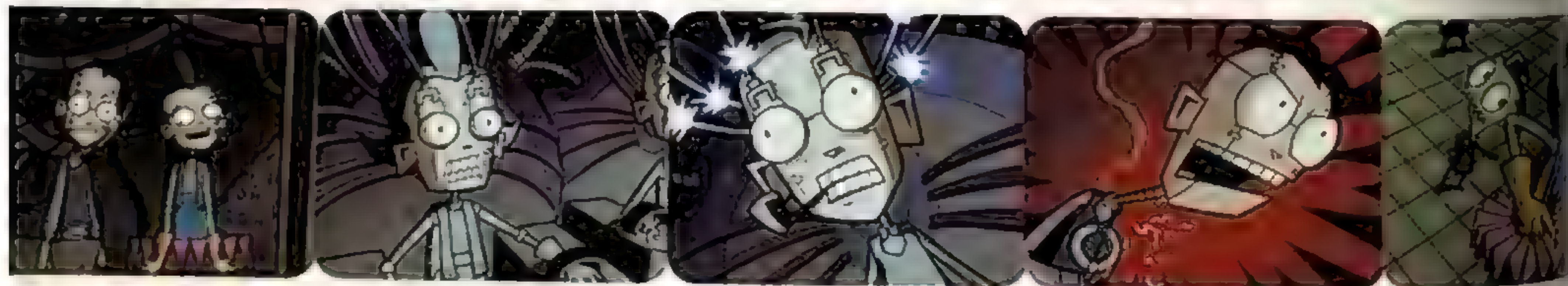
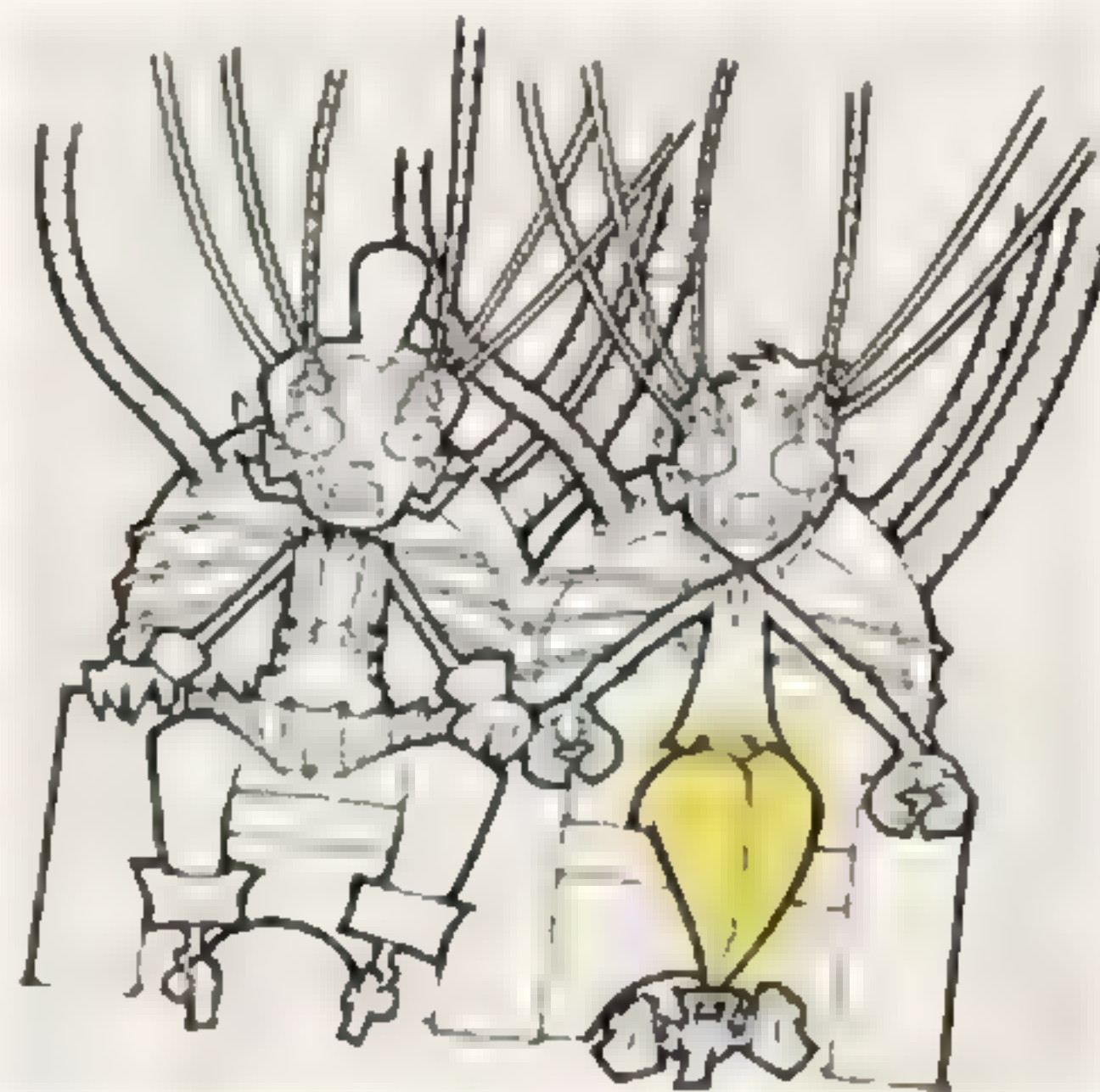


# ROBOPARENTS

Designed by Zim to complete the illusion of suburban domestic normalcy, the Roboparents are mechanical dummies that greet Zim at the door of his secret lair. Best viewed at a distance, these Frankenstein's monster-style androids are clunky and preprogrammed with a limited library of wholesome parent-y dialog. Zim finds more uses for them as the need arises, including using them as parental stand-ins for Skool's parent-teacher night.



**Jhonen:** I really just liked the idea of surrounding Zim with nothing real. Just this artificial reality around him. But he's not lonely, there's nothing lonely about him. It sounds incredibly lonely, but he doesn't know that it is. I always think that Zim's greatest power is that he absolutely lacks self-awareness. There's nothing introspective about him, unless it leads to the conclusion that he's great. So the Roboparents were just an opportunity to draw more robots.



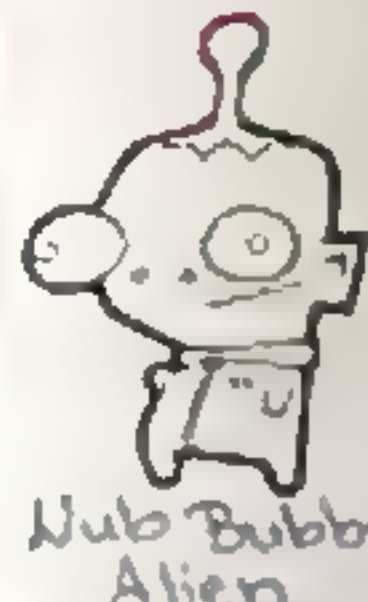
**Above:** The Roboparents were featured in the episode "Parent Teacher Night" (EP3A).

**Opposite:** The kids in Skool dressed up for Halloween in the episode "Halloween Spectacular

of Spooky Doom" (EP14), and so each model needed a costume design update.



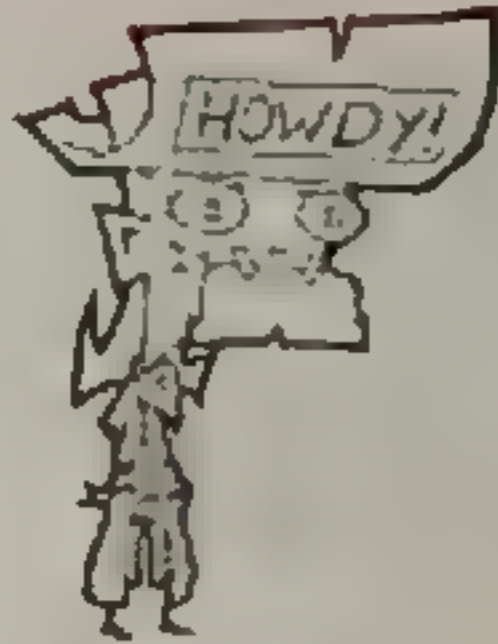
# CITIZENS OF EARTH



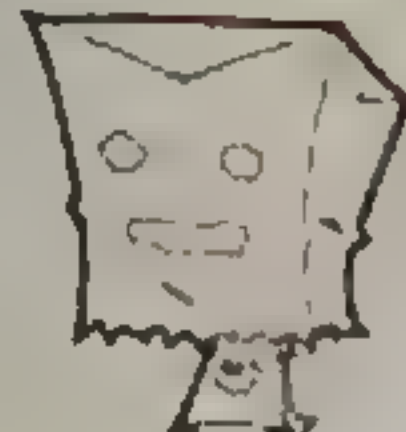
Nub Bubbling Alien



Mummy Zootch



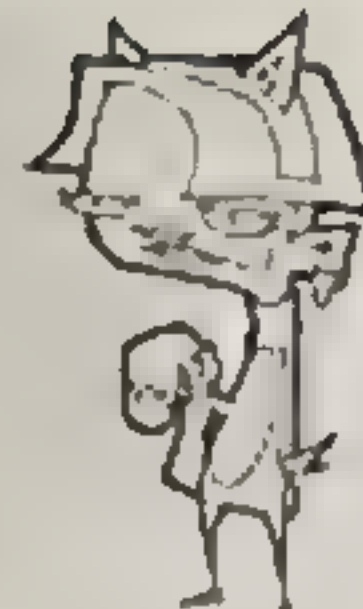
Cowboy Penny



Paper Bag Leaf



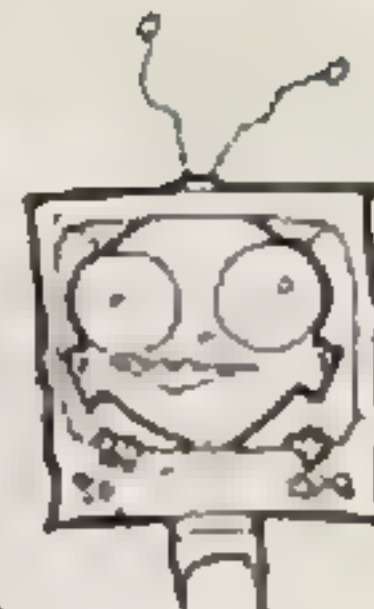
Hogman Matt P. Mothers II



Kitty Smeege



Lizard Taz



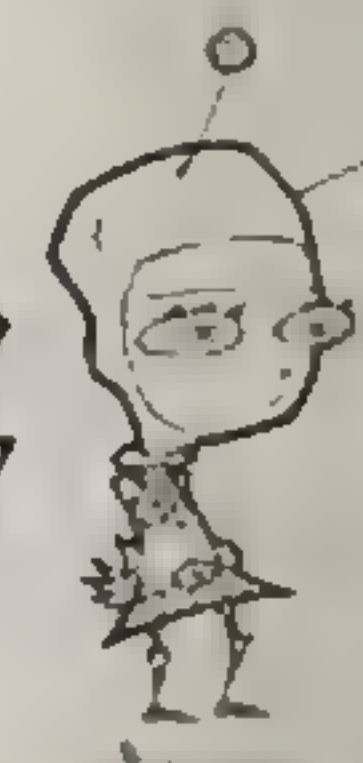
TV Melvin



Mr. Lincoln (Sketch)



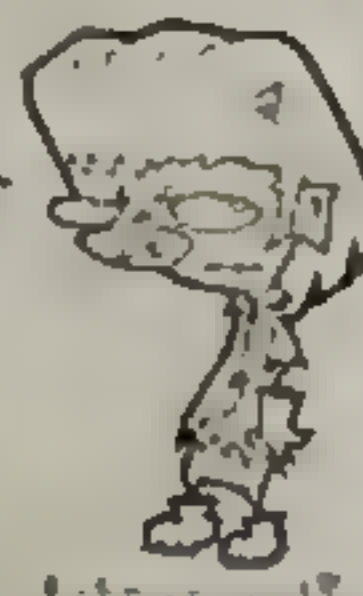
Marla Shark



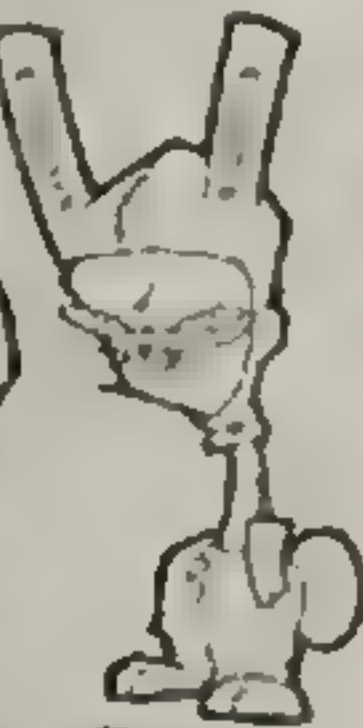
Alien Zita



SKIE CARL



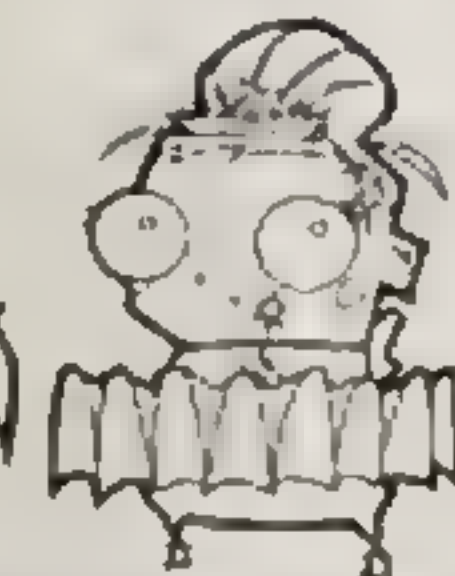
Werewolf Aki



Punny Bryan



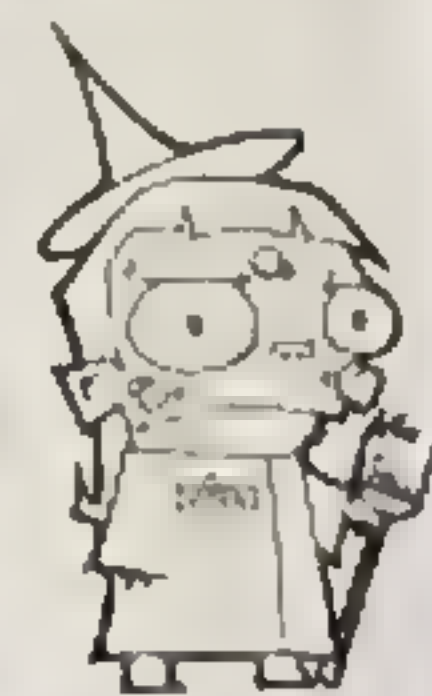
Vampire Letter M



Fairy Princess Mary



Creepy Goomack Rob



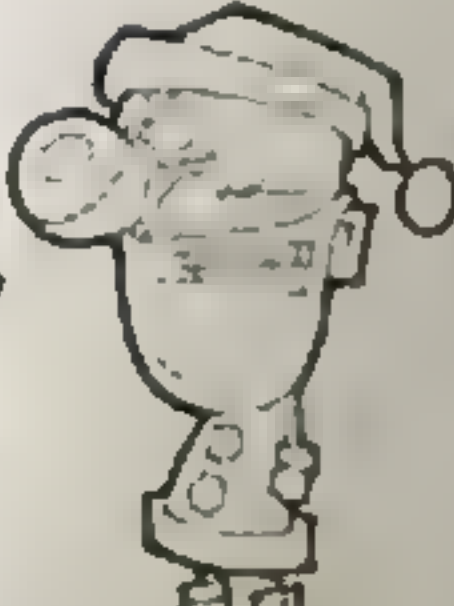
Witch Volga



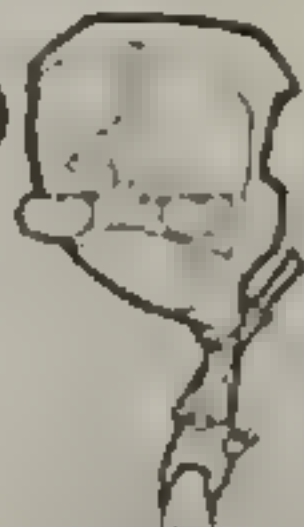
SP1 S



CHAINSAW ALEX



SANTA SCARBALL



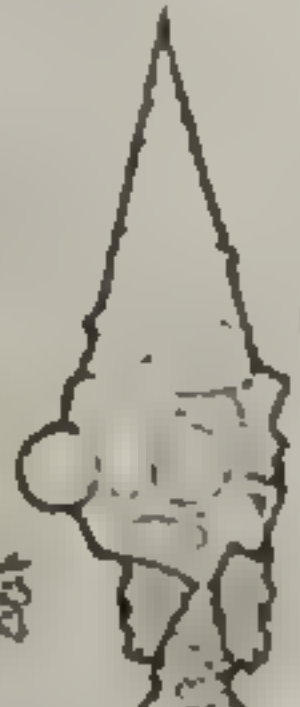
Ninja Meelina



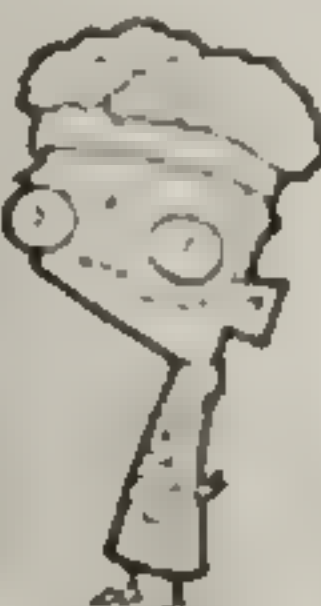
Ghost River of Palms



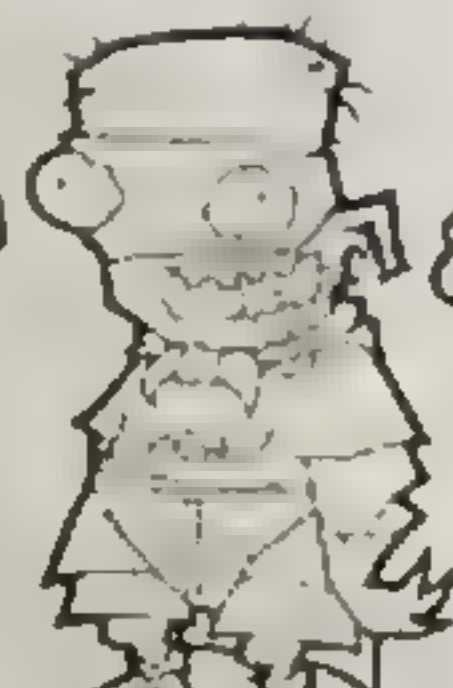
Bugsy Patsy



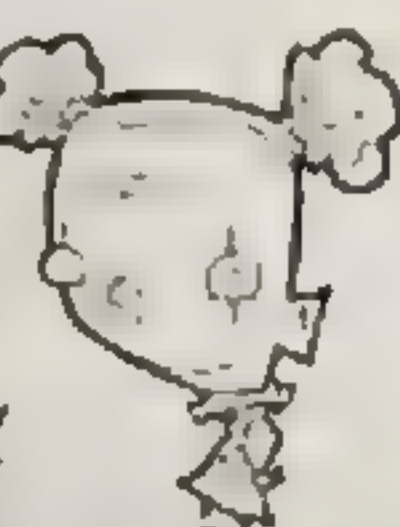
Mitzi the Pain Crack Wizard



Porchy



Gooper Willy



Clown Spacenta



Frankendoot



THE RED BLOOD



KITTEN MARECCA



BE A BIRDIE



BE A BIRDIE



THE BIRDIE BIRDIE



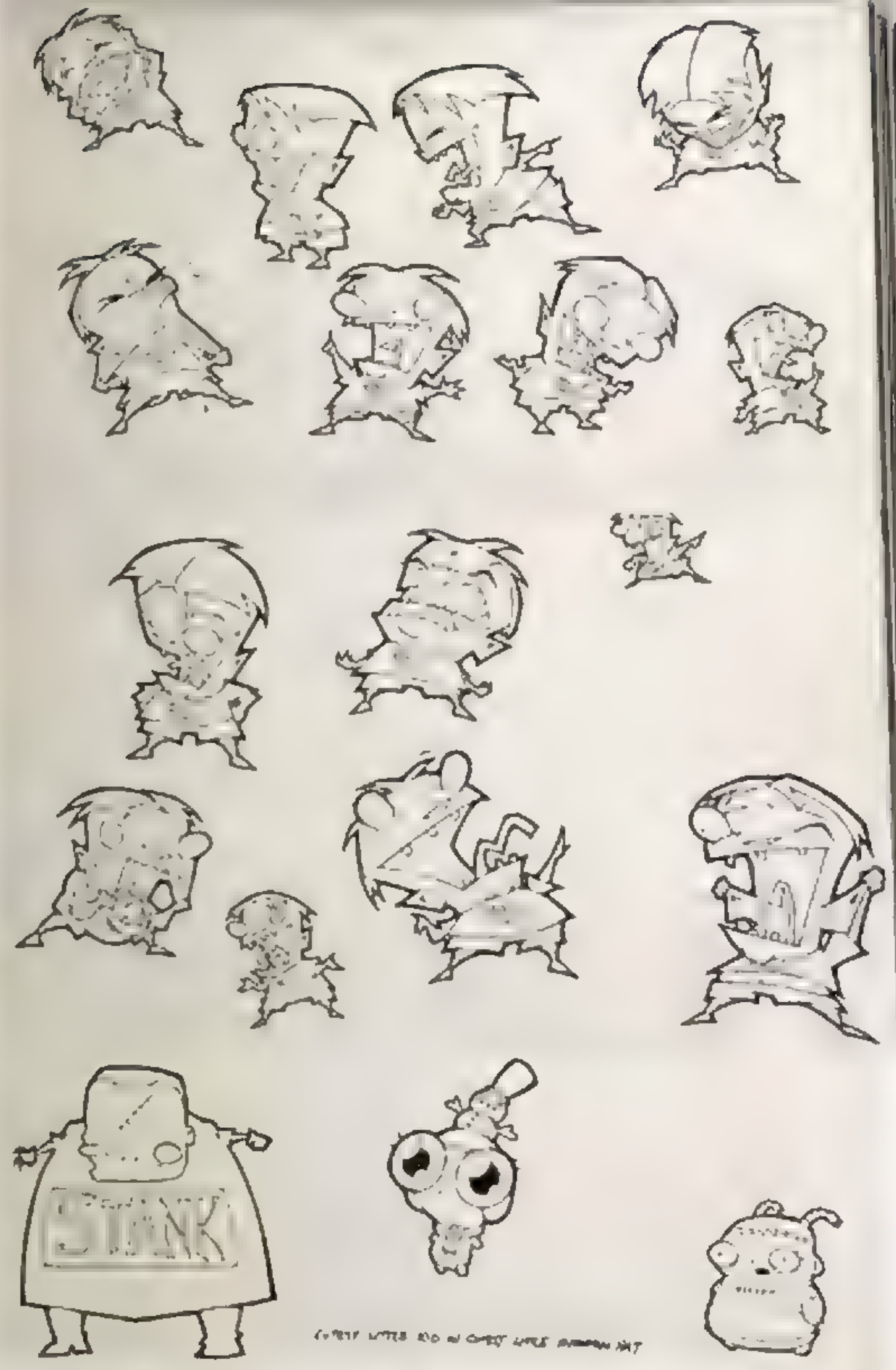
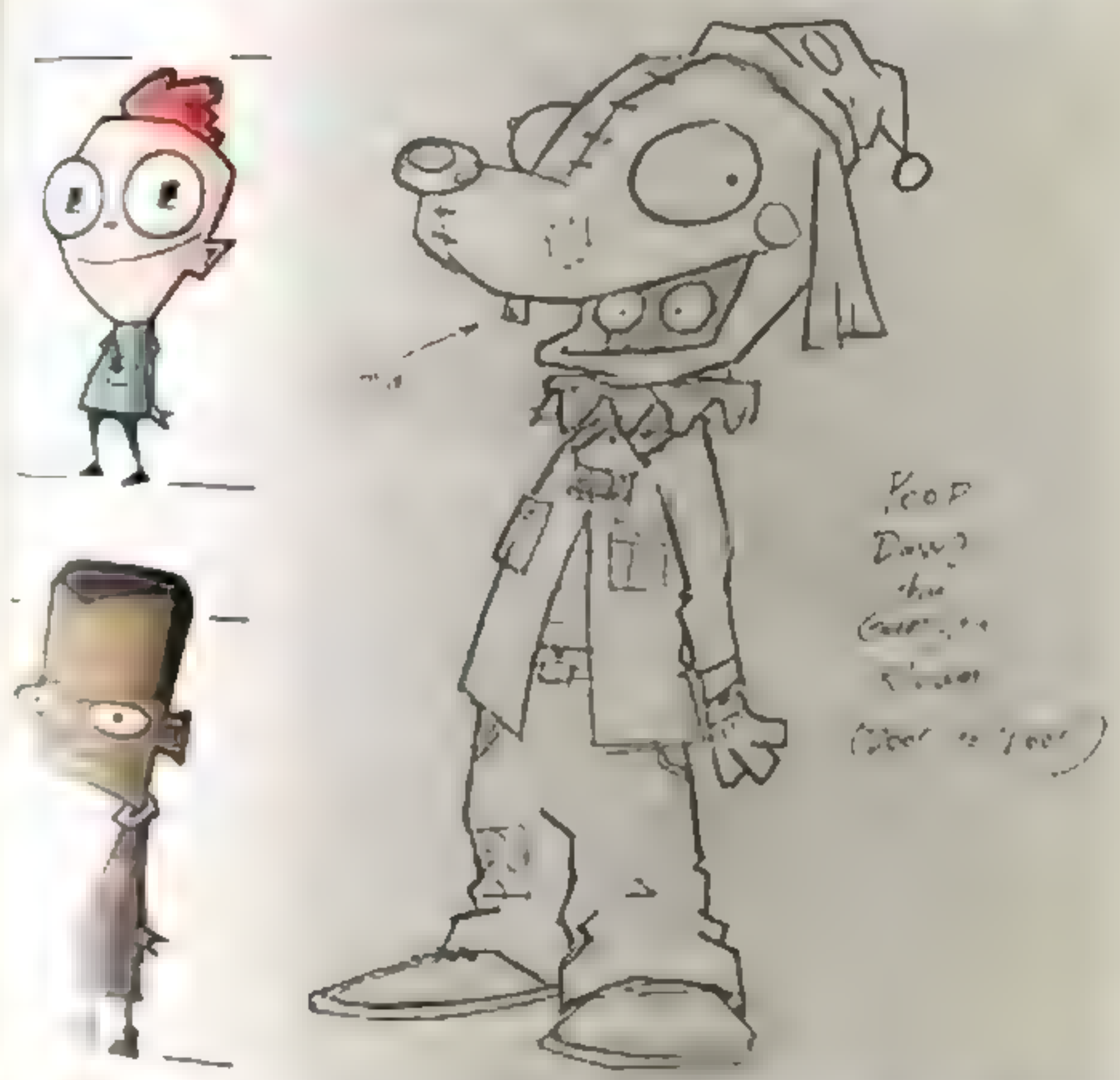
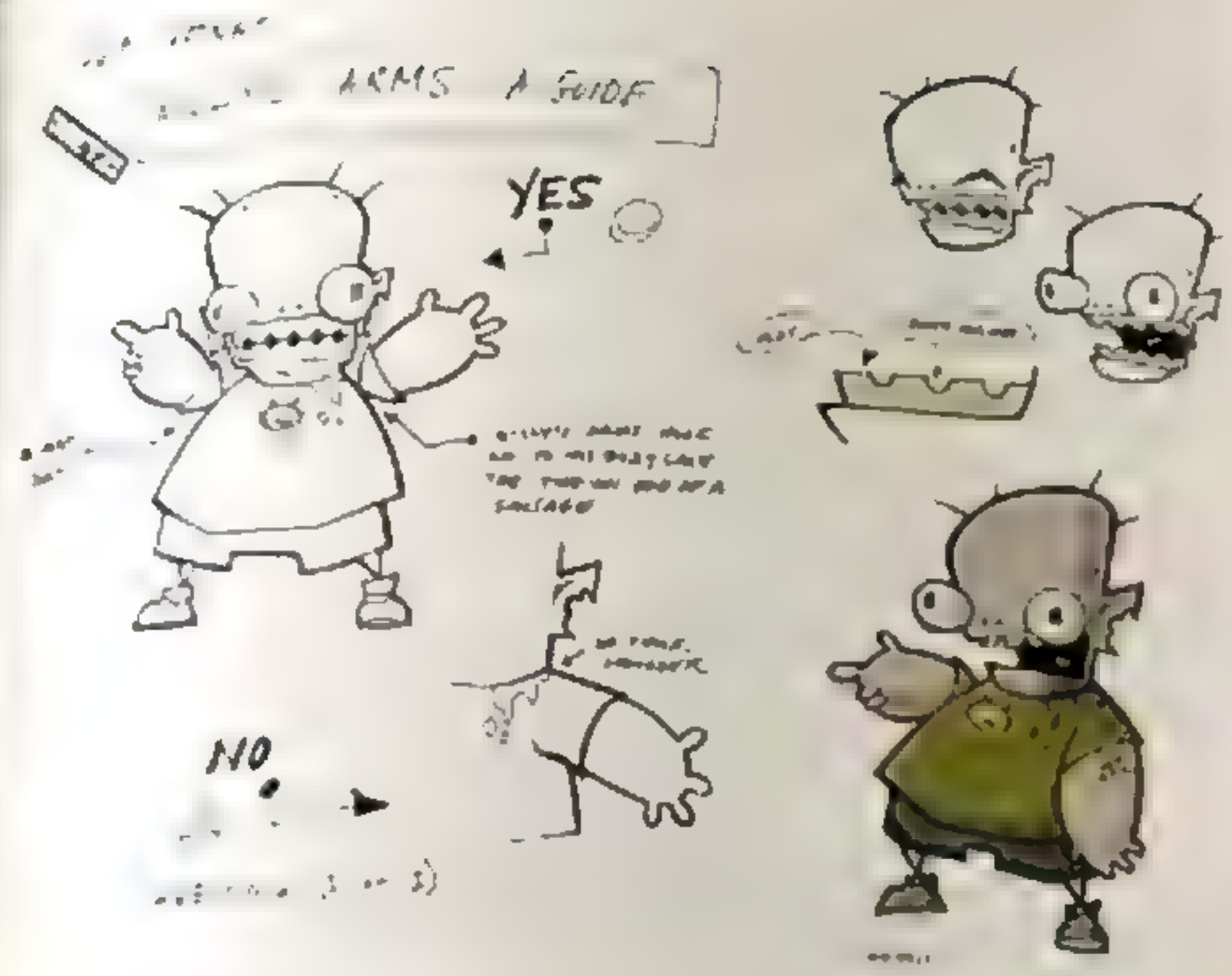
THE BIRDIE BIRDIE





 CITIZENS OF EARTH





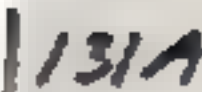
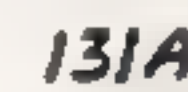
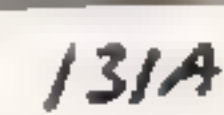
This spread: A small selection of the human life found on planet Earth, including Poop Down the Gangster from the episode "Door to Door" (EP11A), who's unusual arms required a

special guide unto themselves, from the episode "The Voting of the Doomed" (EP24B), and Iggy, the

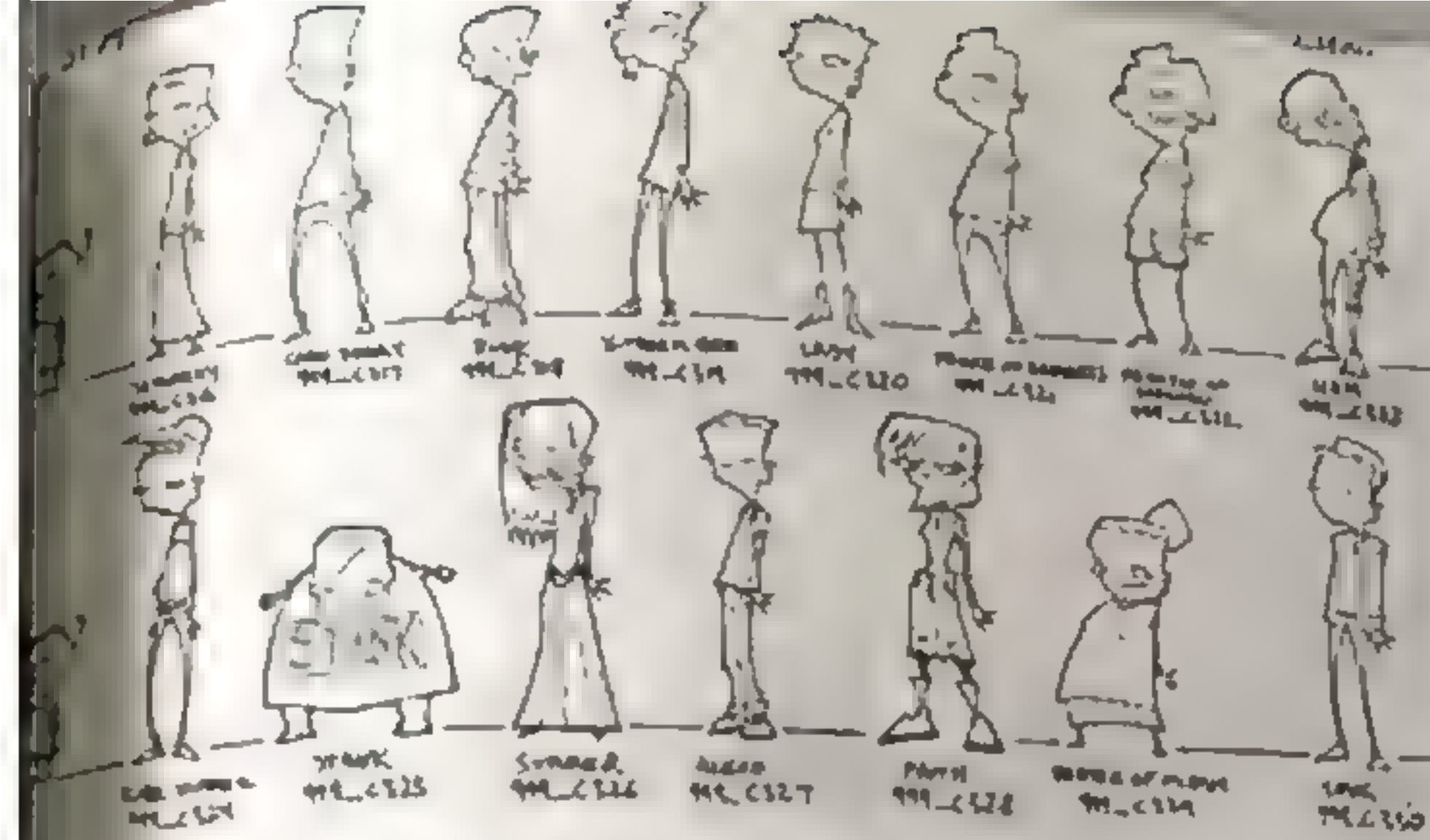
Gaz's gamer rival from the episode "Game Slave 2" (EP12B).



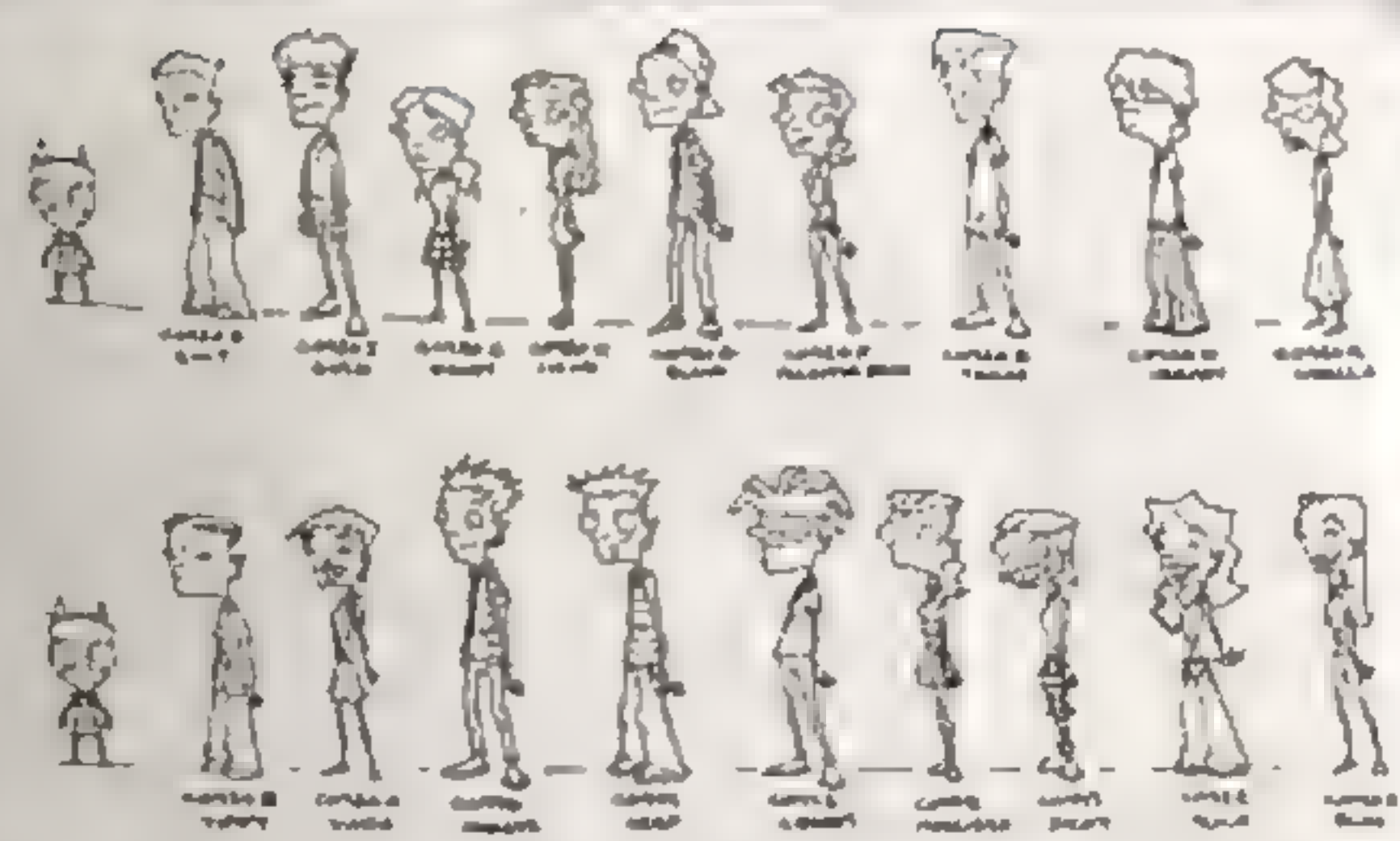
734







131 A



INVADER ZIM STOCK ADULT LINE UP

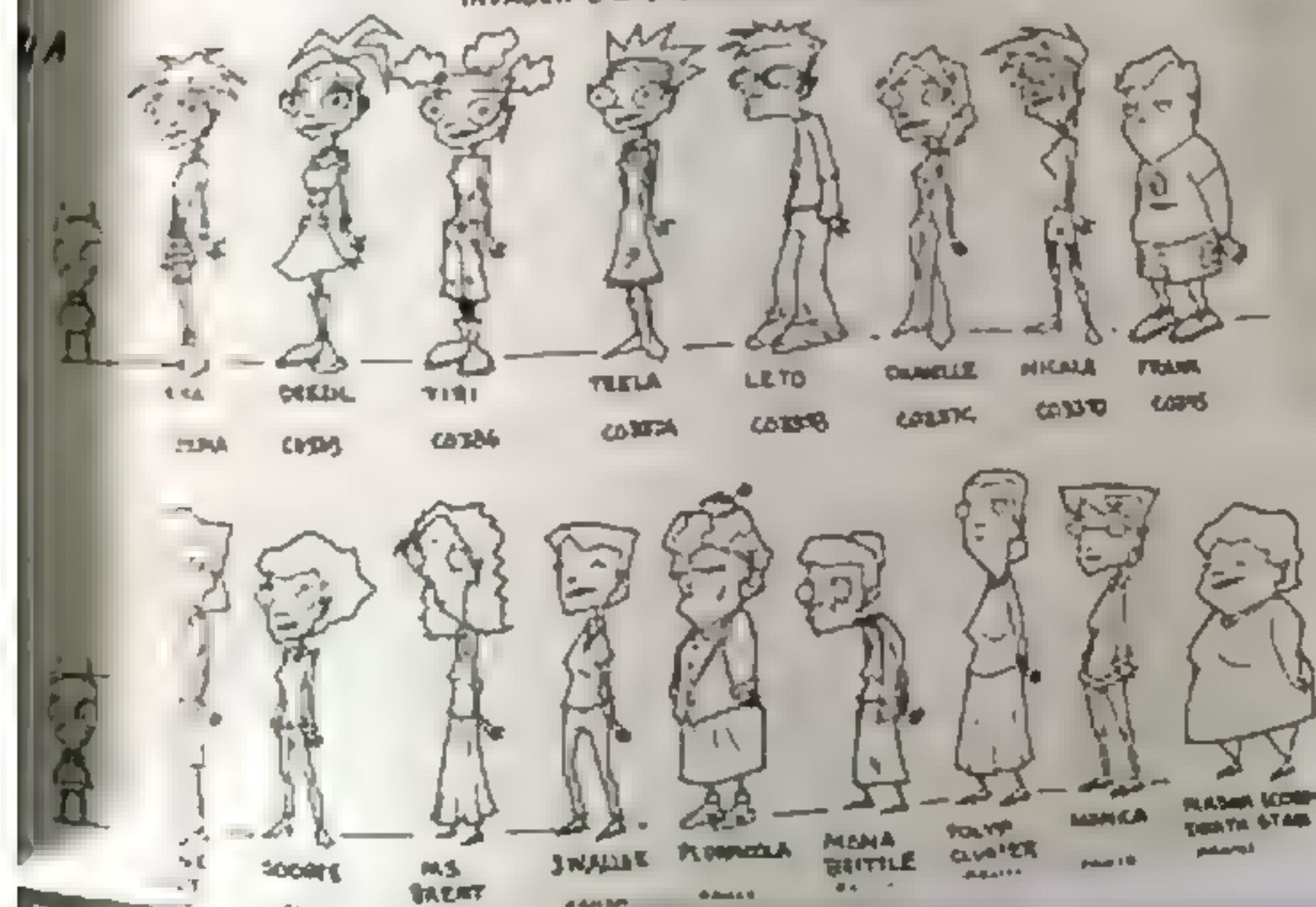


131A

INVADER ZIM STOCK ADULT LINE UP

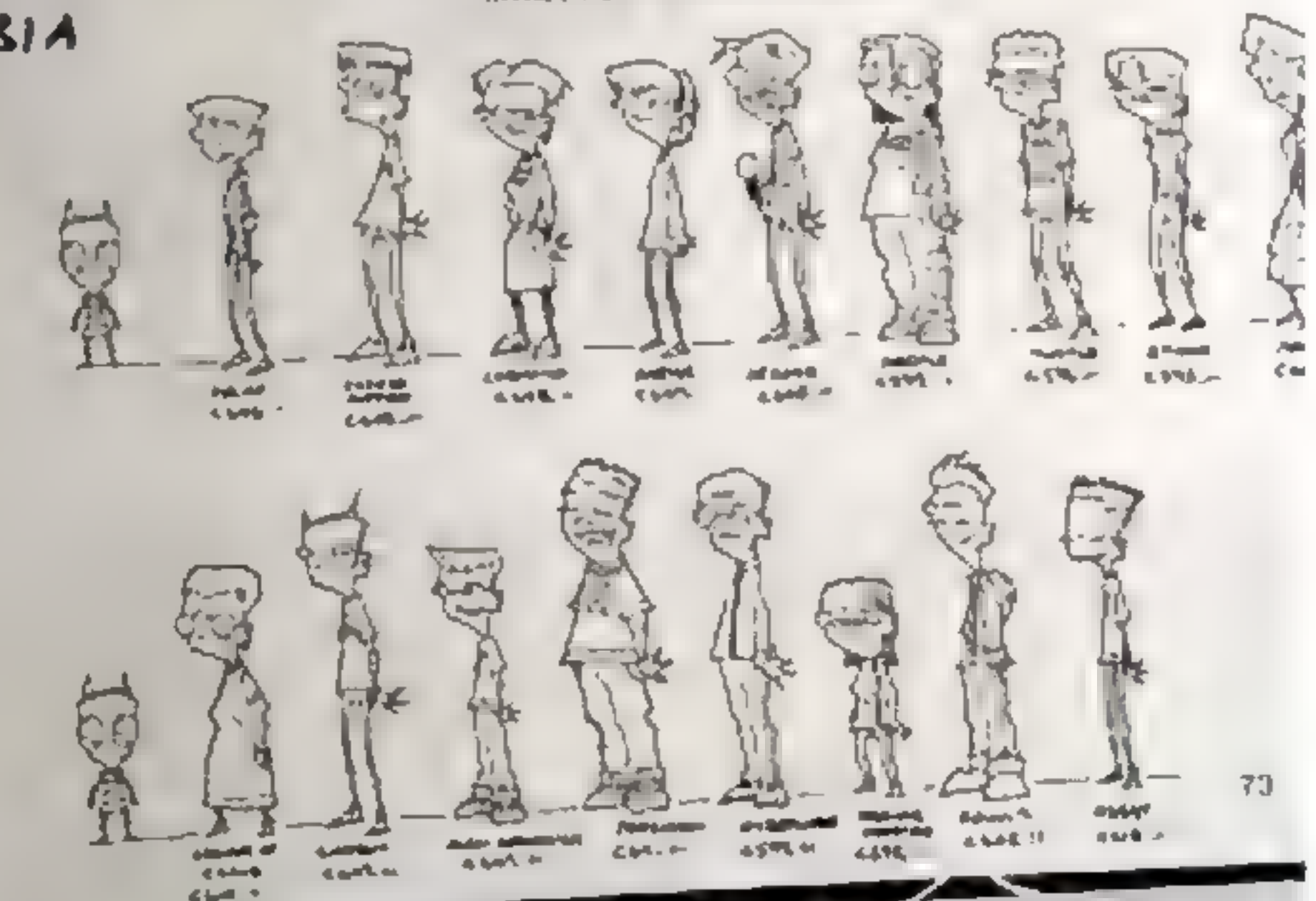


INVADER ZIM STOCK ADULT LINE UP



131A

INVADER ZIM STOCK ADULT LINE UP







CO01 MUSHY ALIEN



CO04 PIGGY

GERM



LERM



SURM



DERM



CO02 ALIEN BABY ELEPHANT



CO03 CHAIR ALIEN



CO05 ALIEN BUBBLE



CO06 ALIEN BUBBLE



CO07 ALIEN BUBBLE



CO08 ALIEN BUBBLE



ERIC THE BLOB

color color folders



CO09 ALIEN BUBBLE



CO10 ALIEN BUBBLE



CO11 ALIEN BUBBLE



CO12 ALIEN BUBBLE



CO13 ALIEN BUBBLE



CO14 ALIEN BUBBLE



CO15 ALIEN BUBBLE



CO16 ALIEN BUBBLE



CO17 ALIEN BUBBLE





RESISTY ALIEN 3



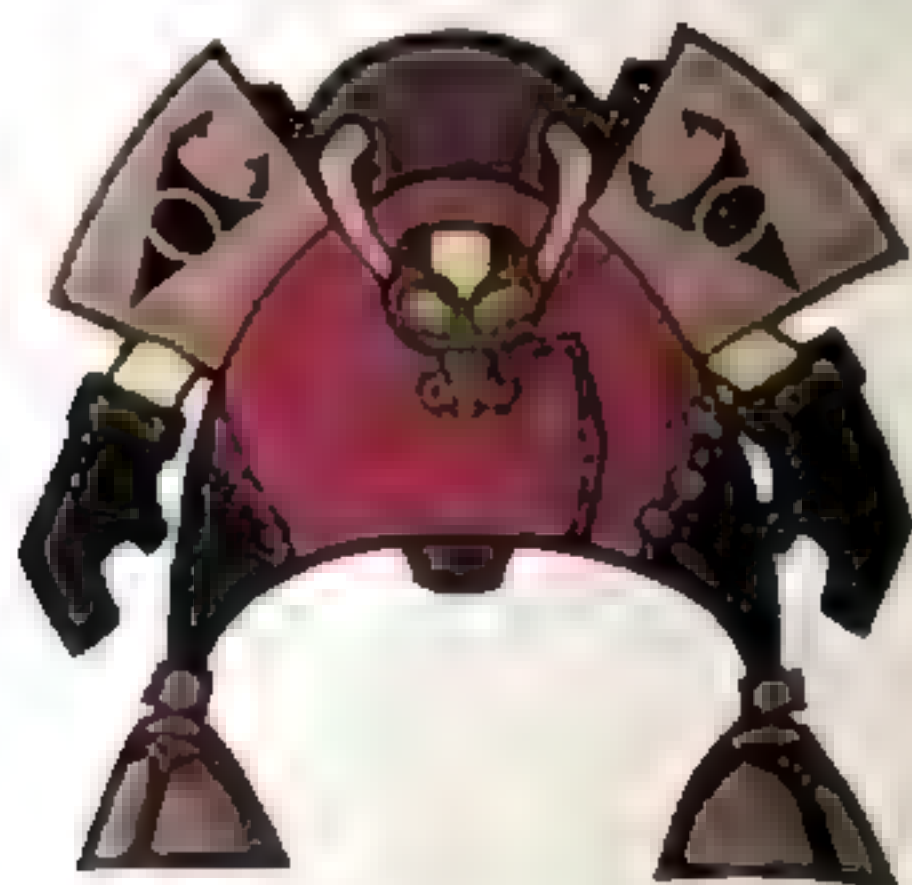
C001 BRAIN PARASITE



LOW PROFILE RESISTY ALIEN ENGINEER



VOAC



RESISTY ALIEN MARCH



RESISTY ALIEN



C011 DIRT H12



RESISTY ALIEN 5



C012 RESISTY ALIEN 8



C011 RESISTY ALIEN 7



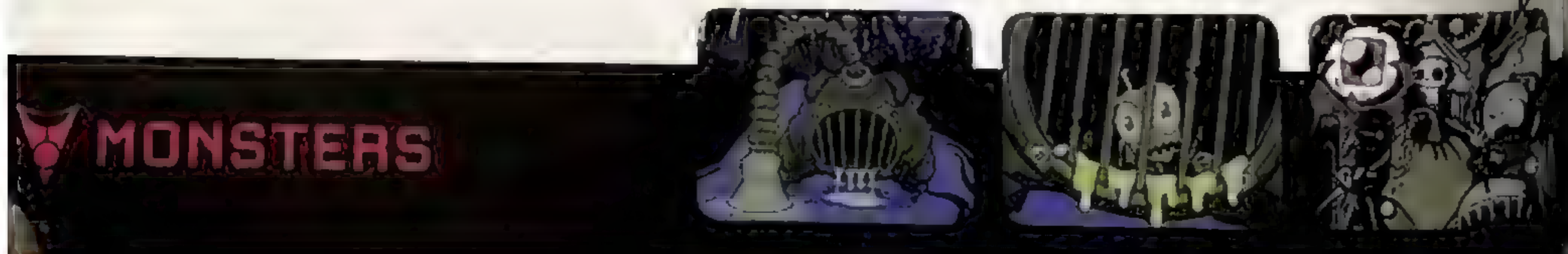
C010 RESISTY ALIEN 6

This spread: A sampling of alien designs from the Zim universe, including Eric the Blob and Saz-Low in backpack and space suit from the

episode "The Frycook What Came from All That Space" (EP26), and a variety of Resisty Aliens and Zim's gigantic Brain Parasite from the

episode "Backseat Drivers from Beyond the Stars" (EP21).









The episode "Halloween Spectacular" (EP14) required many creatures to be created that were

specific to this single episode. Depicted above are 1. Droogle, 2. Simon Riddle (a play on Rikki Simons, series color designer and voice of Gil),

3. Ralphie, 4. Pecker, 5. Insect Related Beast Thingy, 6. Bride of Maria, 7. unnamed creature, 8. Orface, 9. Puncher of Heads, 10. unnamed

creature, 11. Bobby Joe Ray Billy Sue, 12. unnamed creature, 13. Ouchmaster 5000, 14. unnamed creature, and 15. Giggles.



# HALLOWEEN MONSTER NAME QUICK REFERENCE.



HUMHELFLESH



PEPE



BABBY JOE  
RAY BILLY SUE



SIMON DICKIS



MR. PINCHY



INSECT RELATED  
BEAST THING 2



BRIE  
HART



RALFIE



GIGGLES



ORAFACE



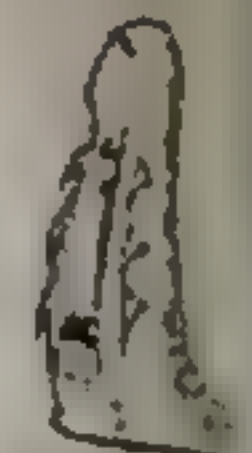
THE ENIGMA



YOLK



PROOGLE



THE SUE



OCULOPD



OUCHMASTER  
5000



POOFER



THE ADMIRAL



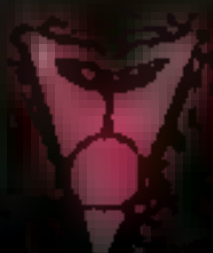
PUNCHER OF  
HEADS



GORDON  
PETERSON



GORDON  
PETERSON  
JR.



MONSTERS





ENORMOUS TERRIFYING SANTA  
WHAT FIGHTS DIB IN HIS REUN SUIT.

INCIDENTAL CHARACTER  
SANTA CREATURE

131A



SANTA MONSTER (SC. 202)



INCIDENTAL CHARACTER  
MONSTER SANTA

131A

INCIDENTAL CHARACTER  
SUPER GIANT MUTATED SANTA



GIANT MUTATED SANTA MONSTER  
LEFT OVERS IN THE CORN AT THE END.



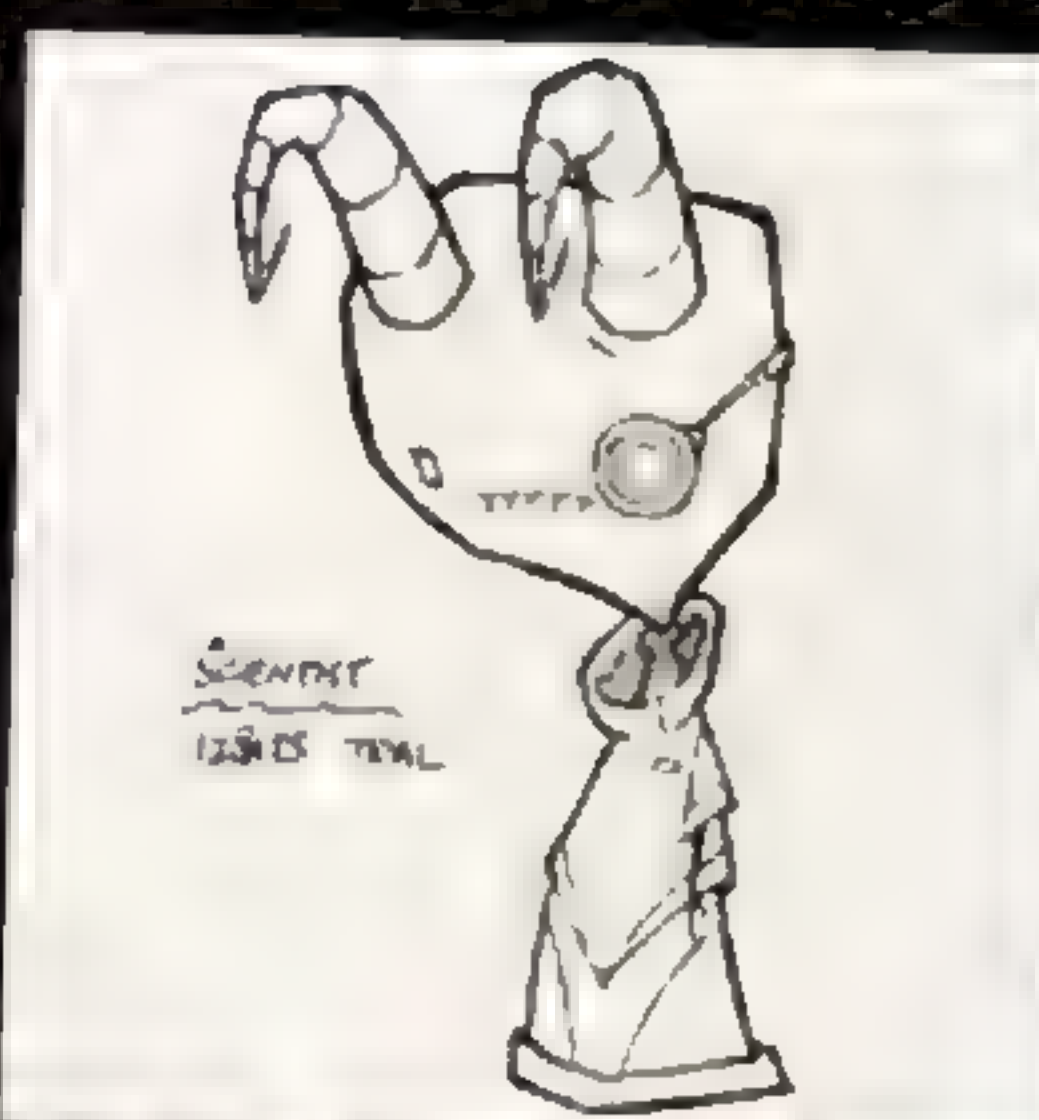
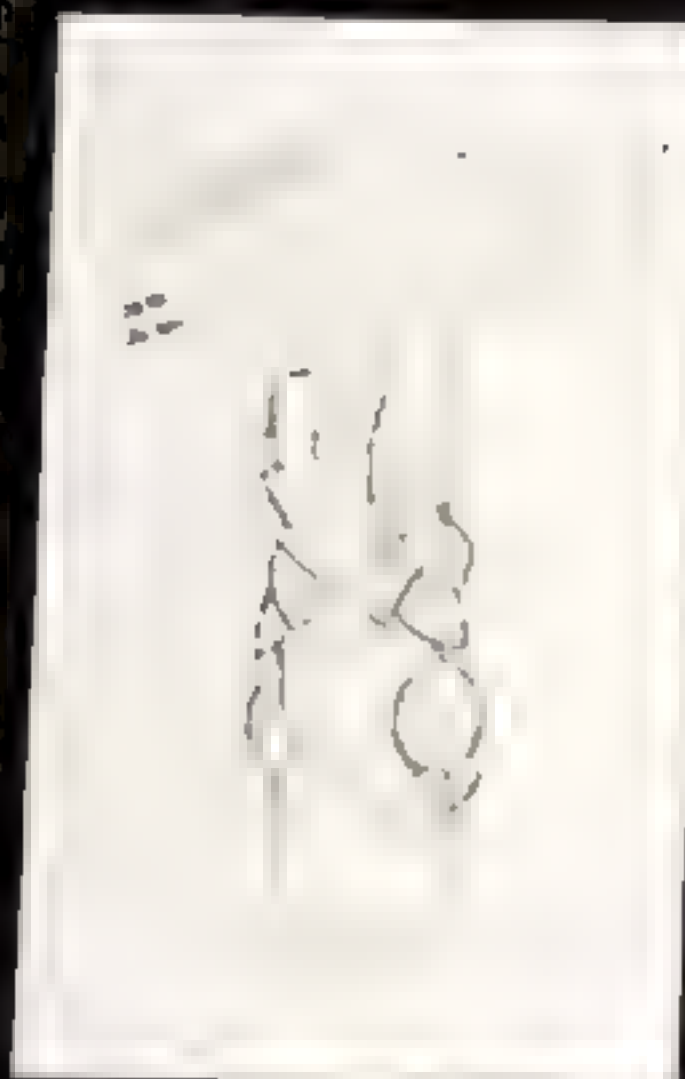
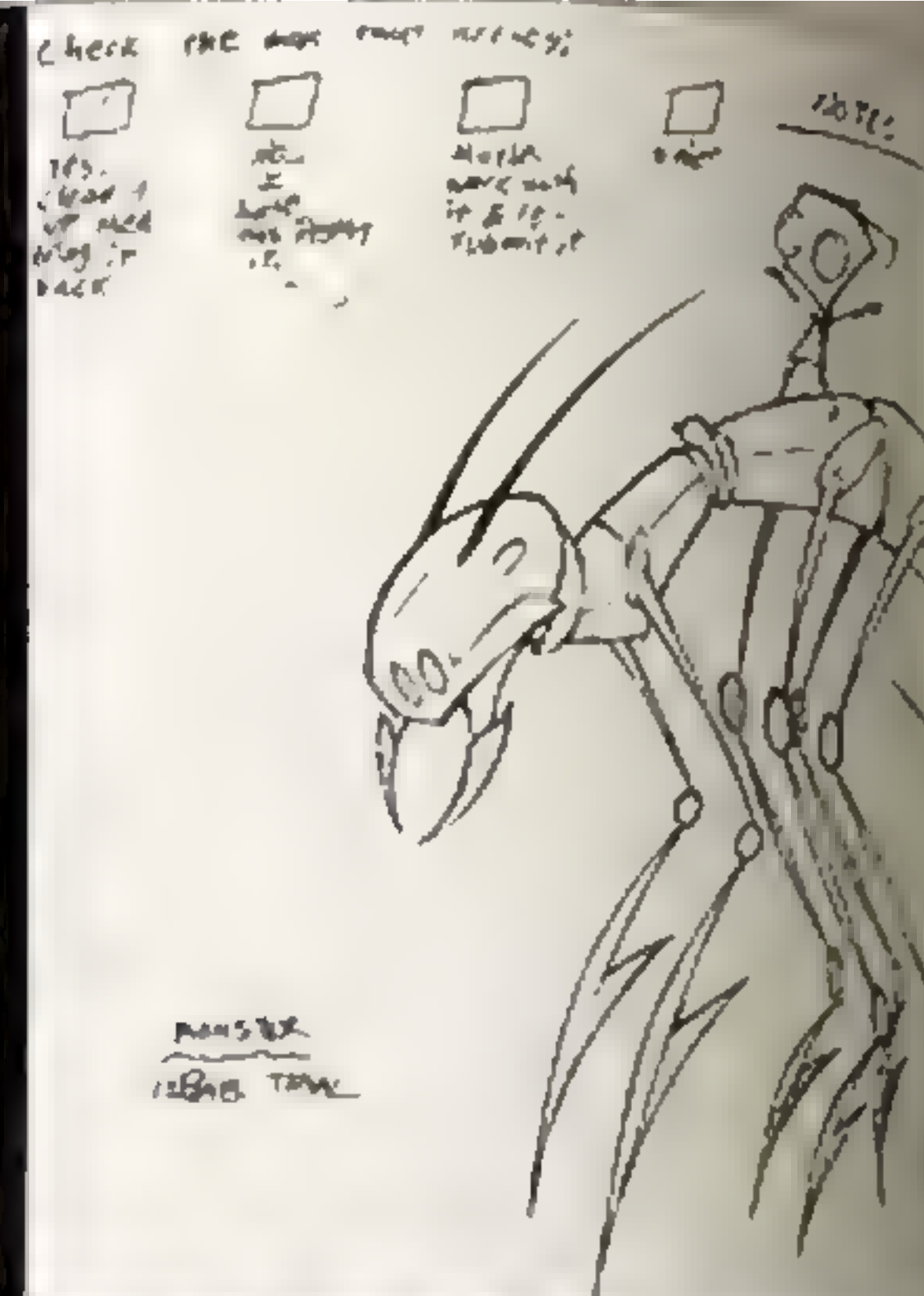
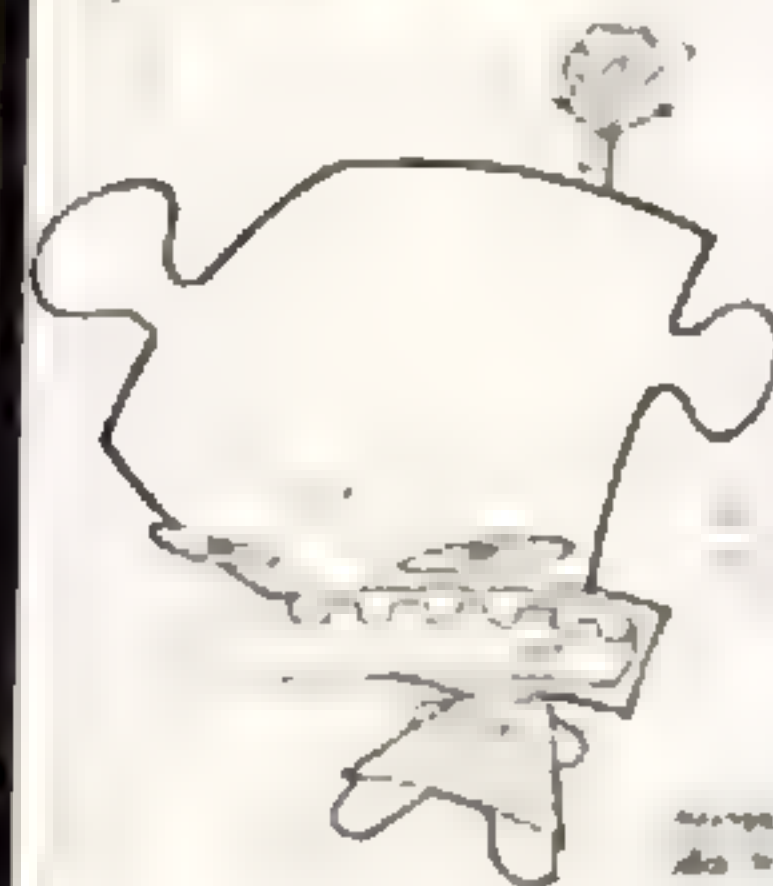
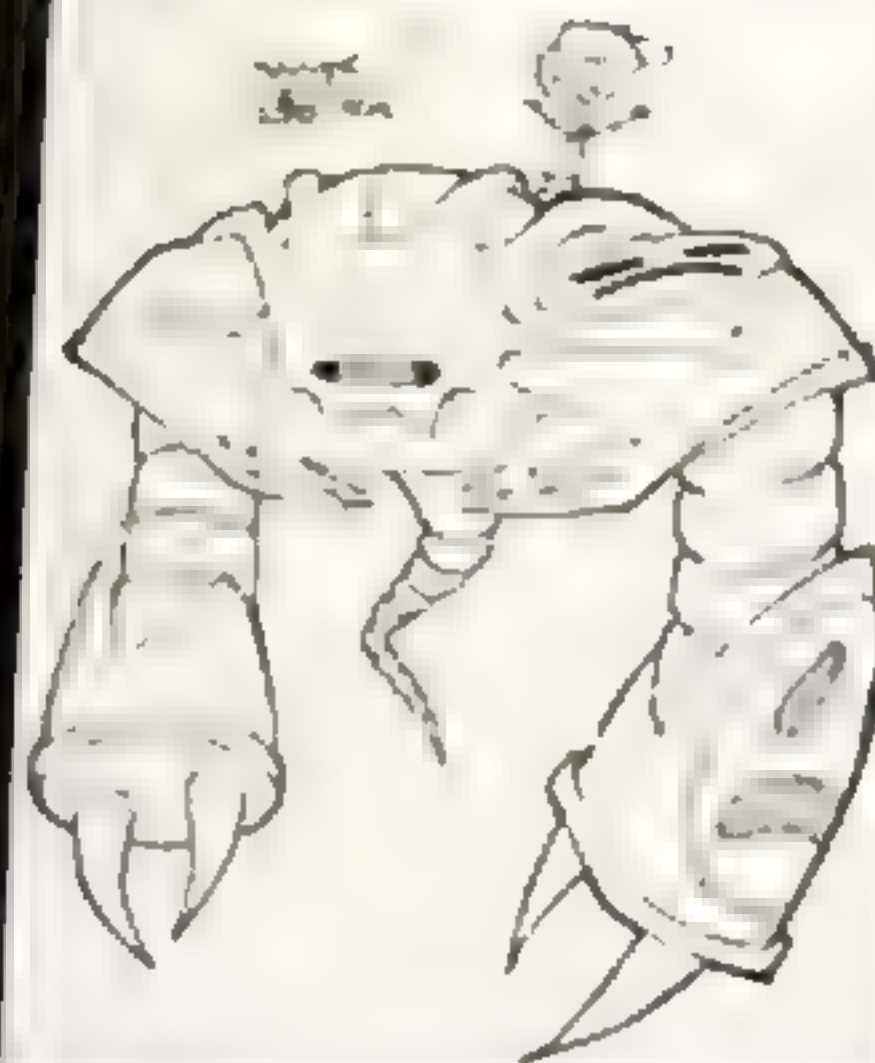
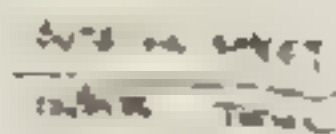
GOSPALA  
SIZED

Opposite: Monsters from the previous spread  
and more are named on the Halloween Monster  
Name Quick Reference sheet above, a fascinating

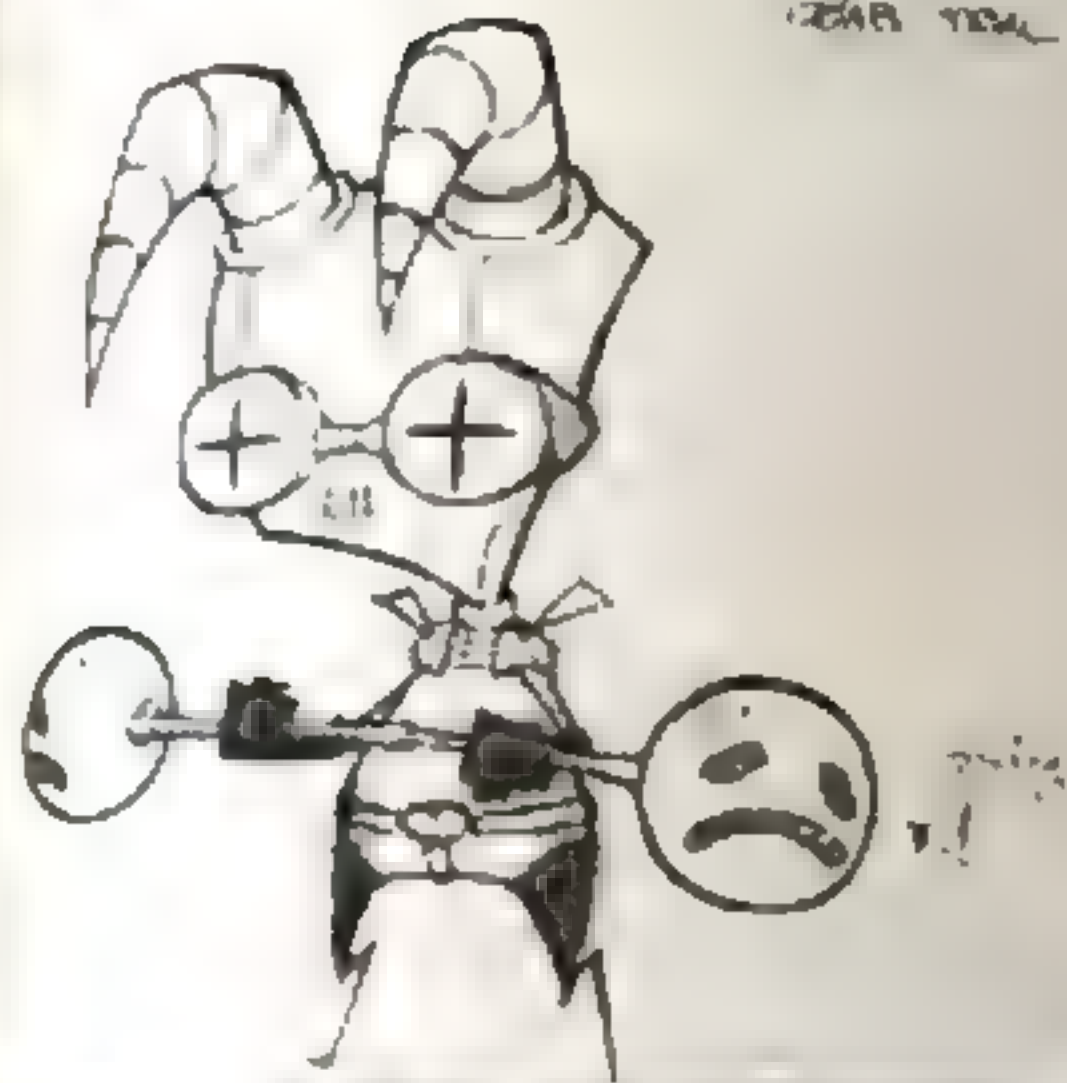
production artifact unto itself from the episode  
"Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom"  
(EP14).

Above: Monster Santa and super Giant Mutated  
Santa hail from the extra special episode "The  
Most Horrible X-Mas Ever" (EP27).









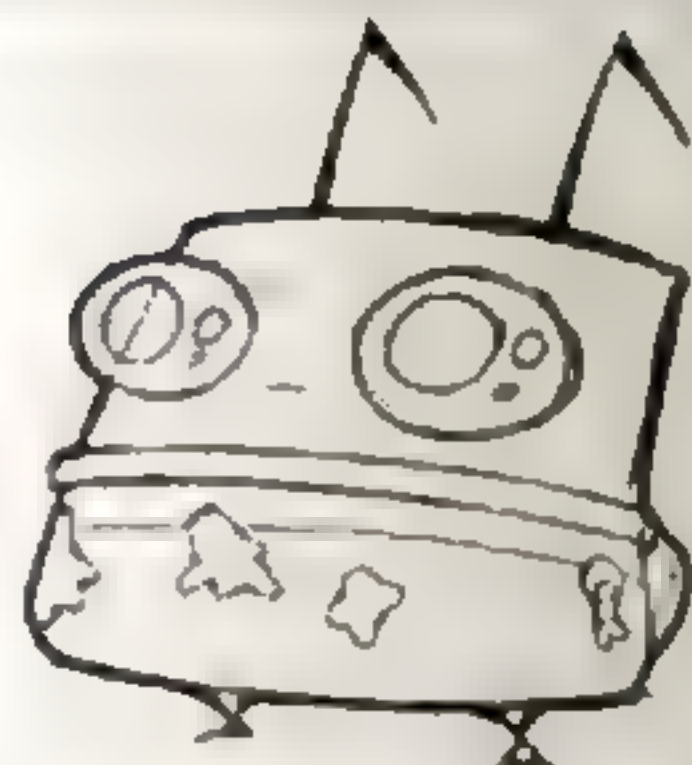
YOUNGER  
LADY  
IN SCIENTIST  
ROBES  
12345 TRAIL



YOUNG ZIM  
12345 TRAIL



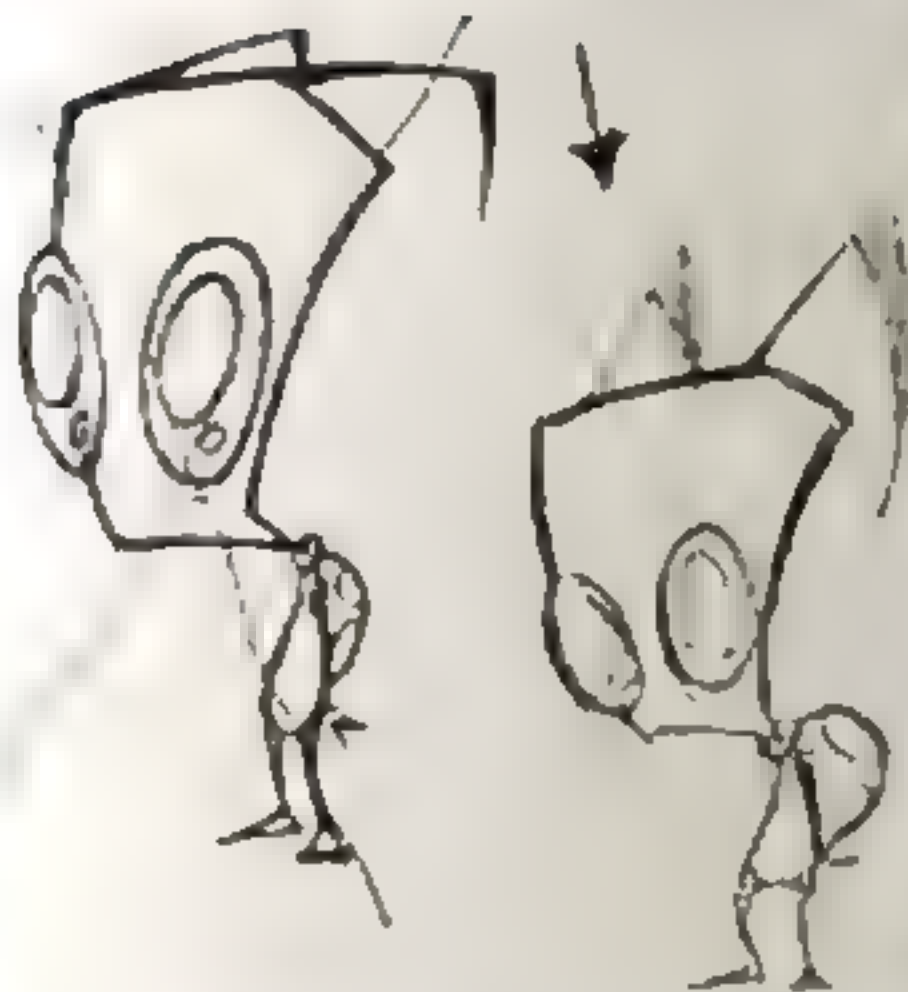
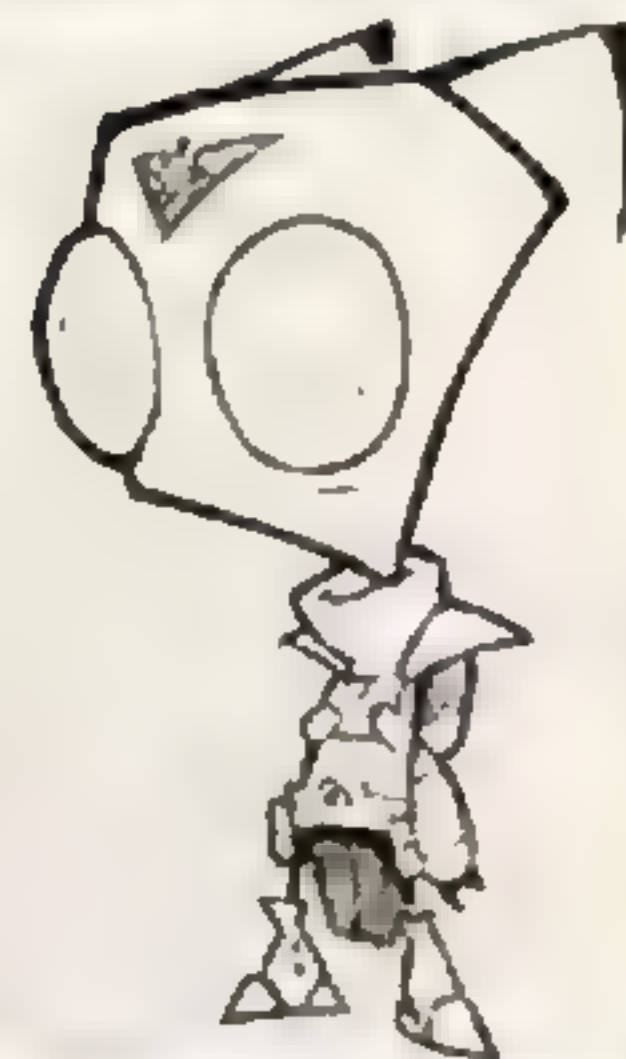
YOUNG SCIENCE  
12345 TRAIL



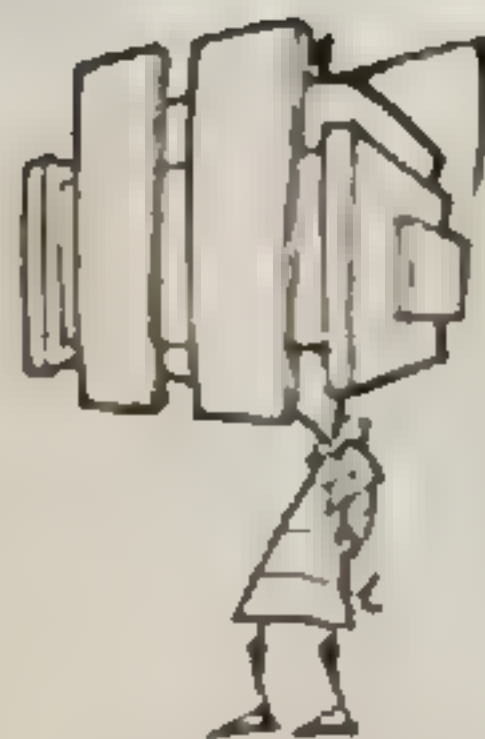
YOUNG  
IN SCIENTIST  
ROBES  
12345 TRAIL



ZIM AS  
IRKEN ELITE  
12345 TRAIL

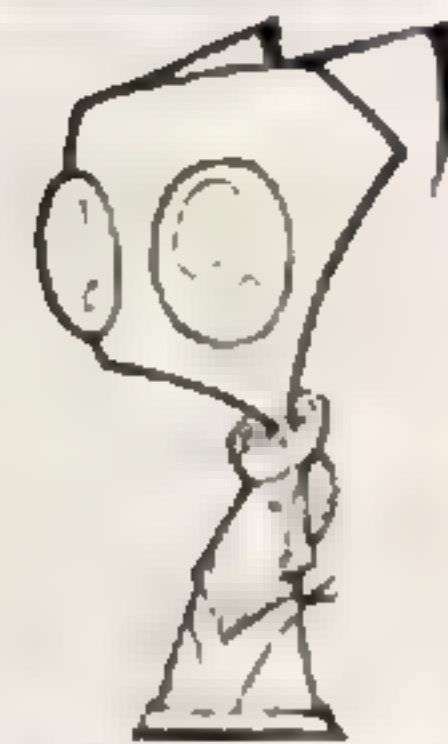


ZIM  
MISUNDERSTOOD  
12345 TRAIL



REMARKS  
PLATES  
12345 TRAIL

ZIM IN  
SCIENTIST  
ROBES  
12345 TRAIL



One of the two unfinished  
was partially developed when  
the cancelled was called 'The Trial'


Zim is brought before the Control Brain for his  
Existence Evaluation by the Almighty Talbot and  
faces the possibility of being deemed defective


and erased from history. Above are some of the  
character designs from this unfinished episode  
including several scientists, messengers, young

versions of the Talbot, Talbot Miyuki, and Zim in  
a variety of costumes.



# CHARACTER ATTITUDE REFERENCE GUIDE (NOT AN OFFICIAL MODEL PAGE)

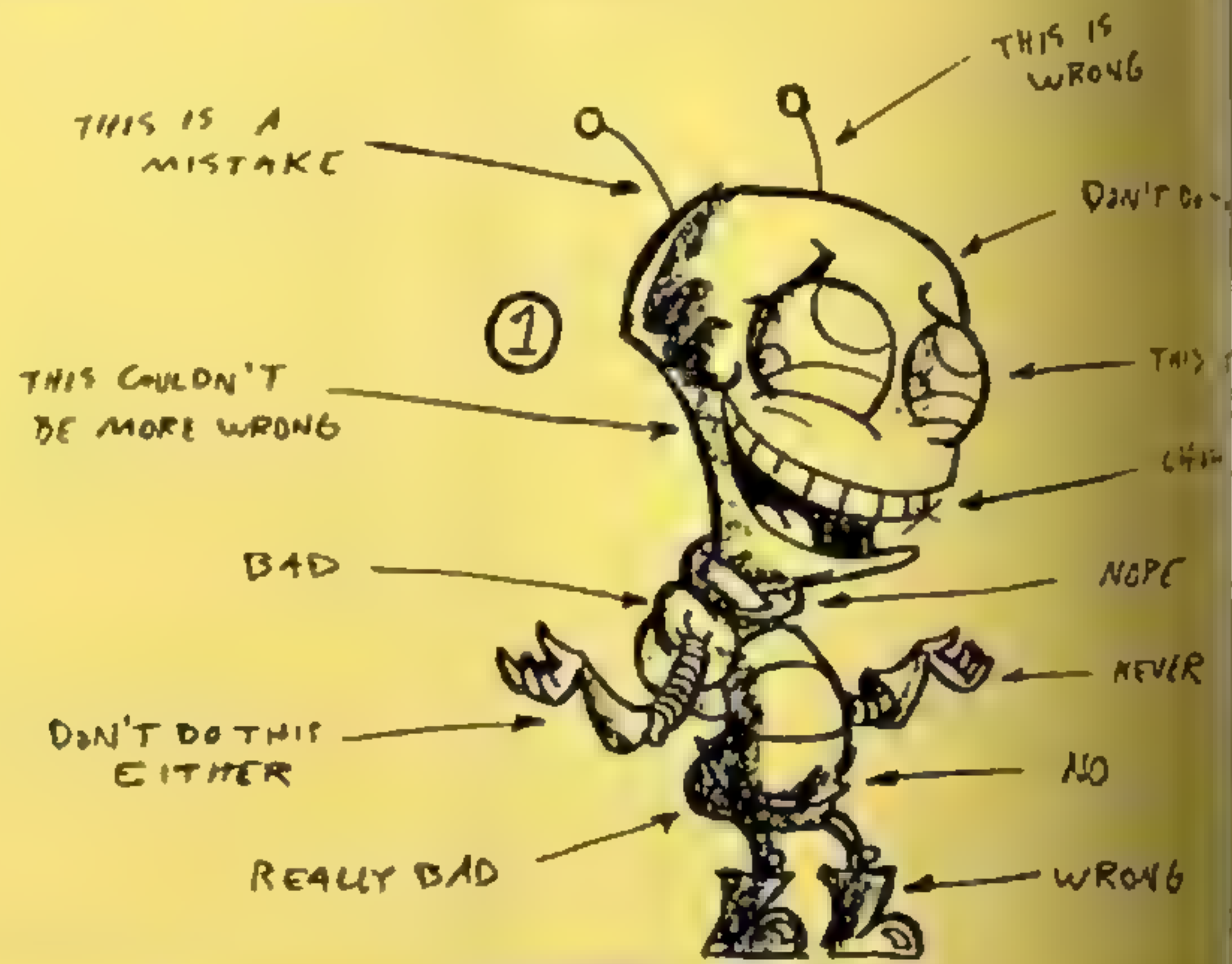
 SOME NICKELODEON PRESS DEPARTMENT ARTISTS SENT THE FOLLOWING DRAWINGS AS ATTEMPTS AT LEARNING THE INVADER ZIM STYLE. I QUICKLY WENT OVER THE DRAWINGS WITH OVERLAYS, AND MADE NOTES ON THEIR DRAWINGS ON WHATEVER ISSUE NEEDED ADDRESSING.

 AGAIN, THESE "CORRECTIONS" WERE DONE WITH HASTE, AND AS A RESULT, THEY AREN'T THE MOST ON-MODEL DRAWINGS OF ZIM AND FRIENDS - HOWEVER, THROUGH COMPARISON, THIS CAN BE A HELPFUL REFERENCE GUIDE FOR ... CHARACTER ATTITUDES.. JUST LIKE IT SAYS AT THE TOP OF THE...

THIS IS  
HOW IT WORKS:



MY "CORRECTION"

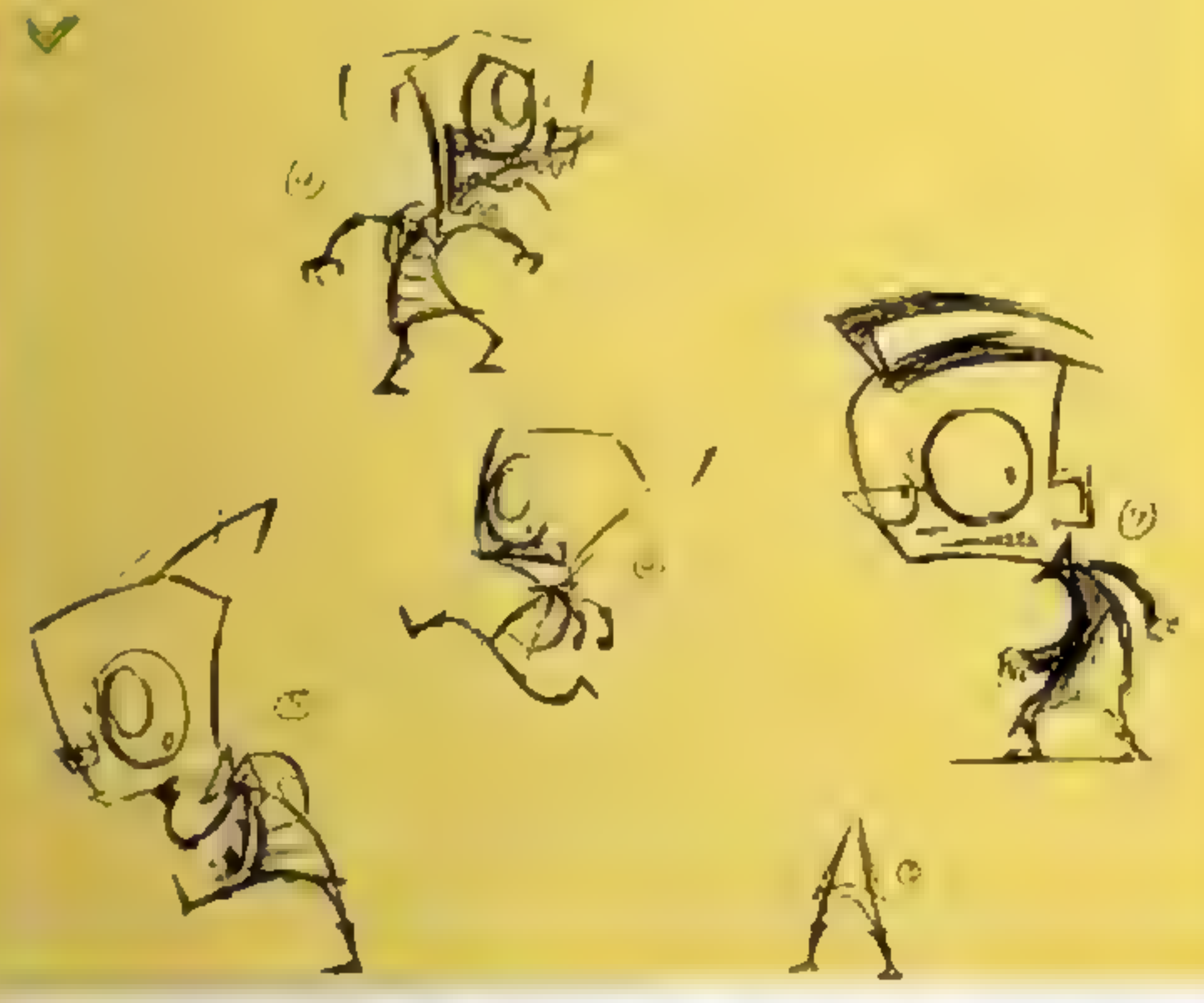
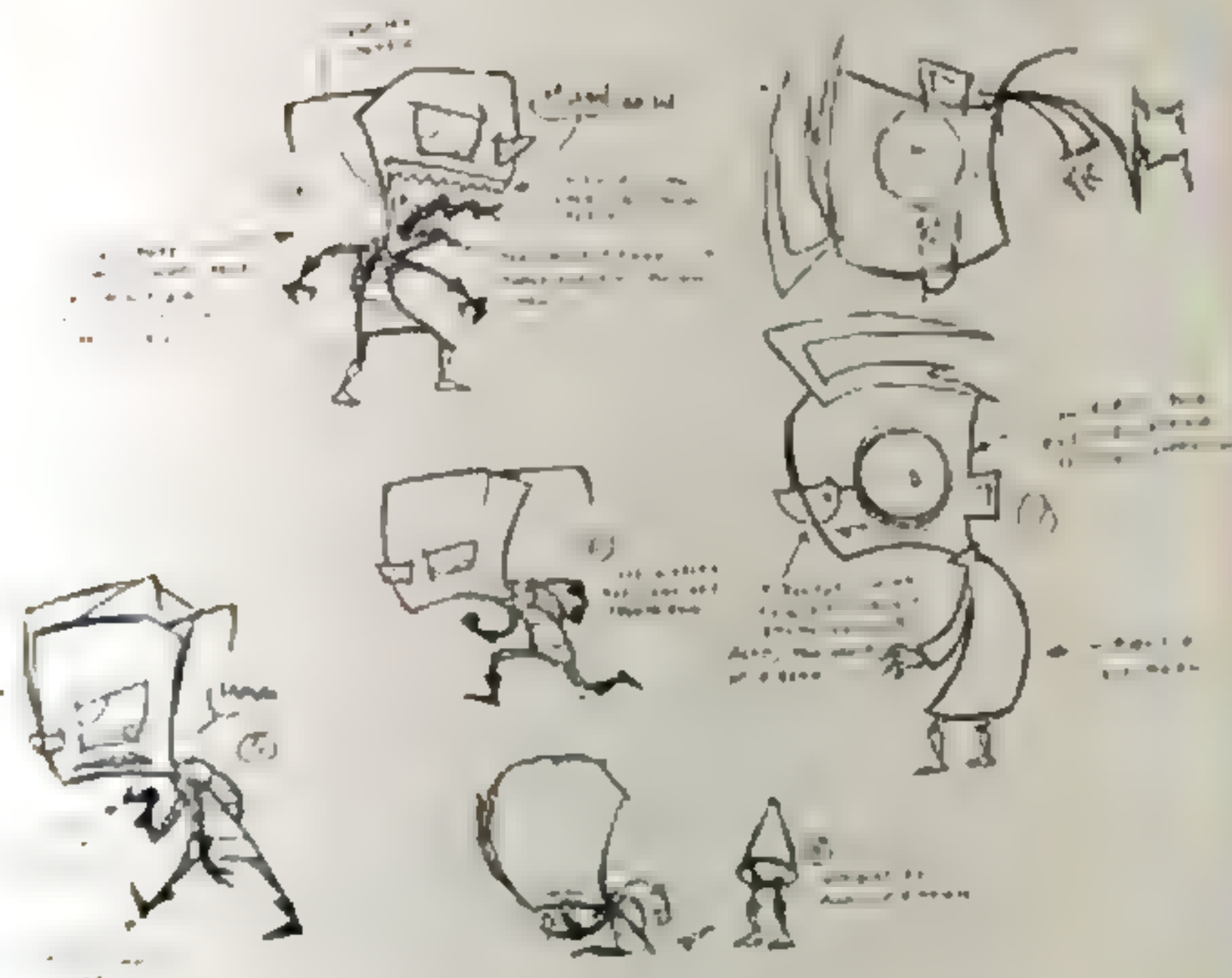
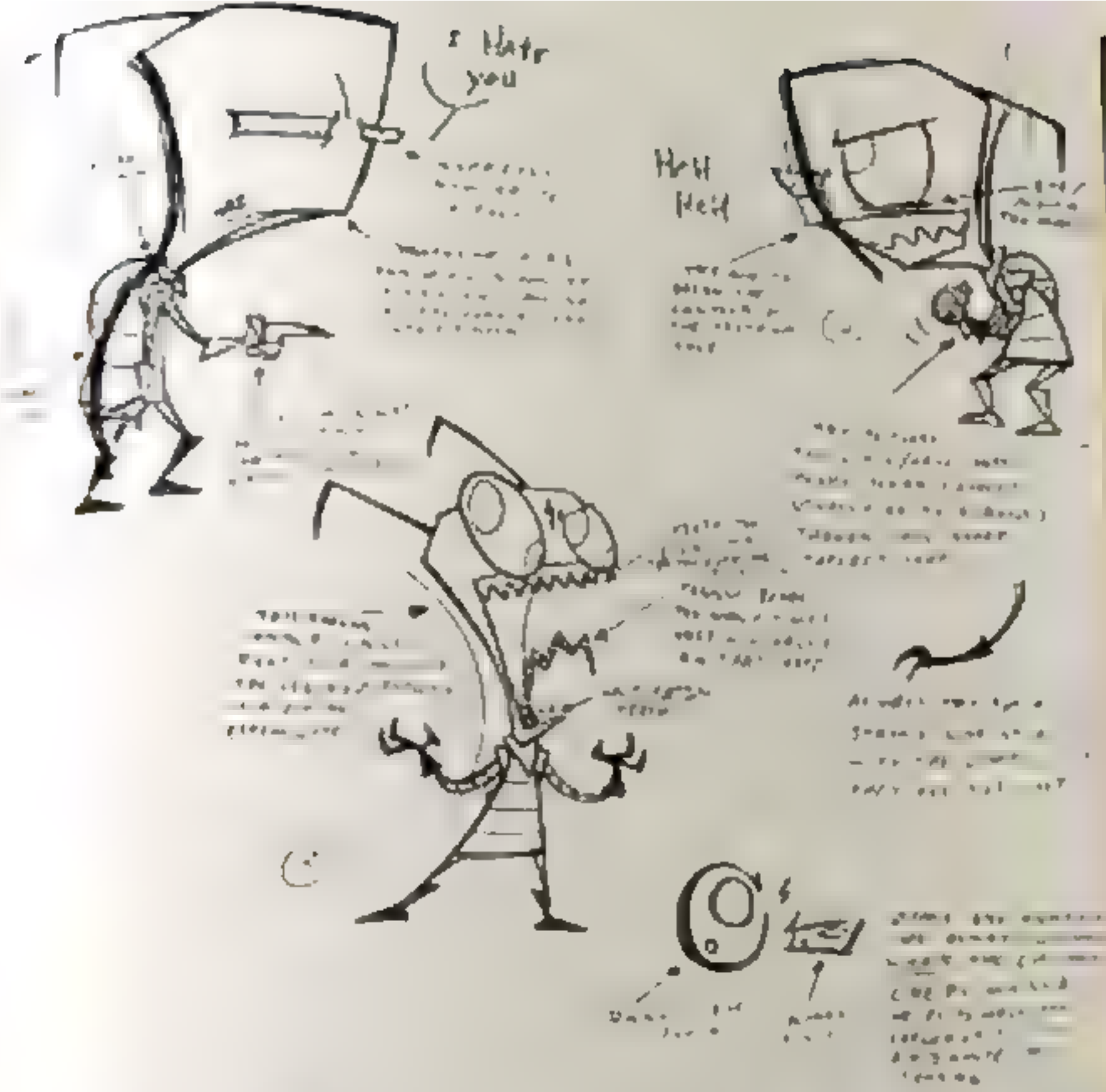


ORIGINAL DRAWING



CHARACTER GUIDES



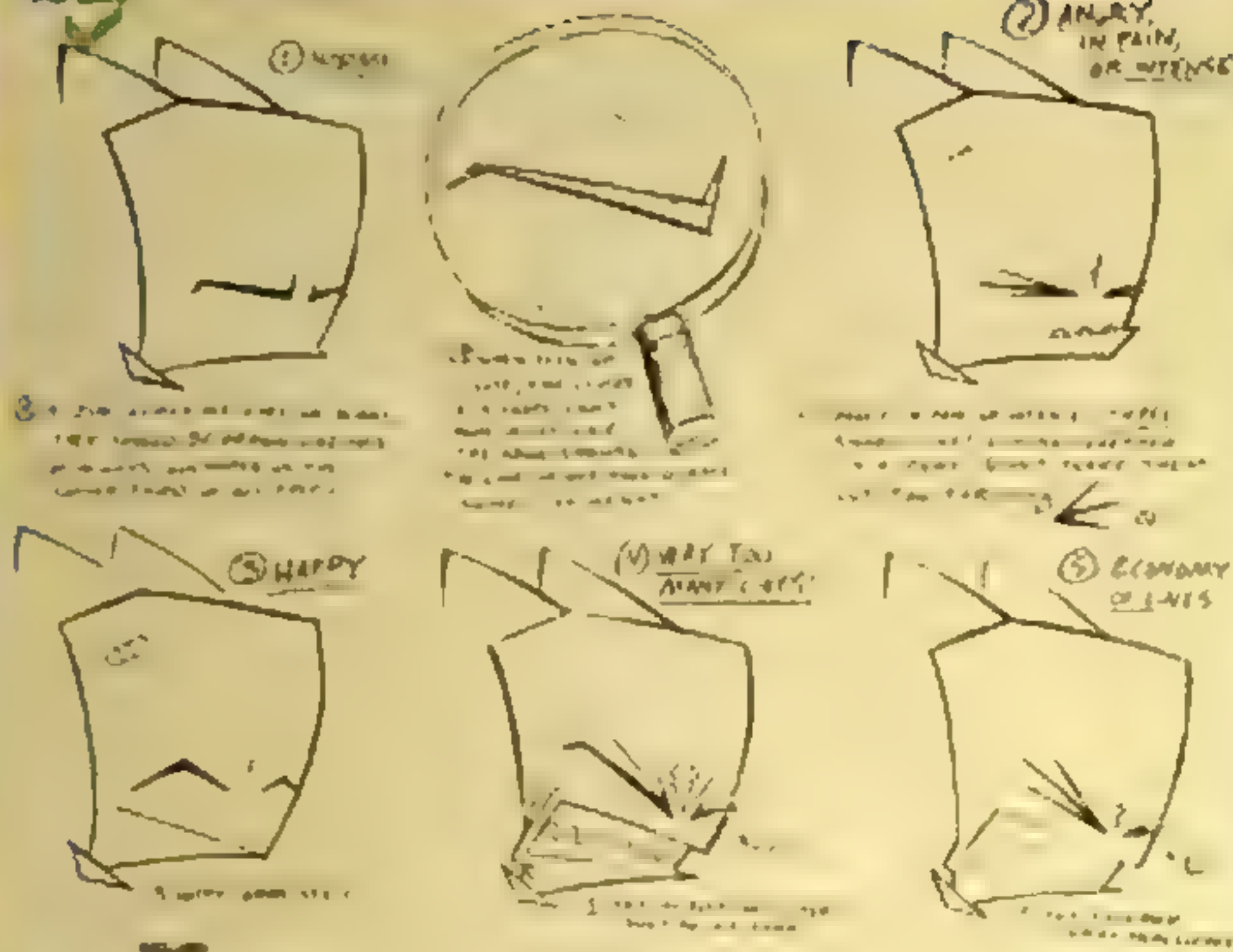


This spread: Bryan Kossitzke created pages of reference material for other artists within Nickelodeon so that they could better emulate the

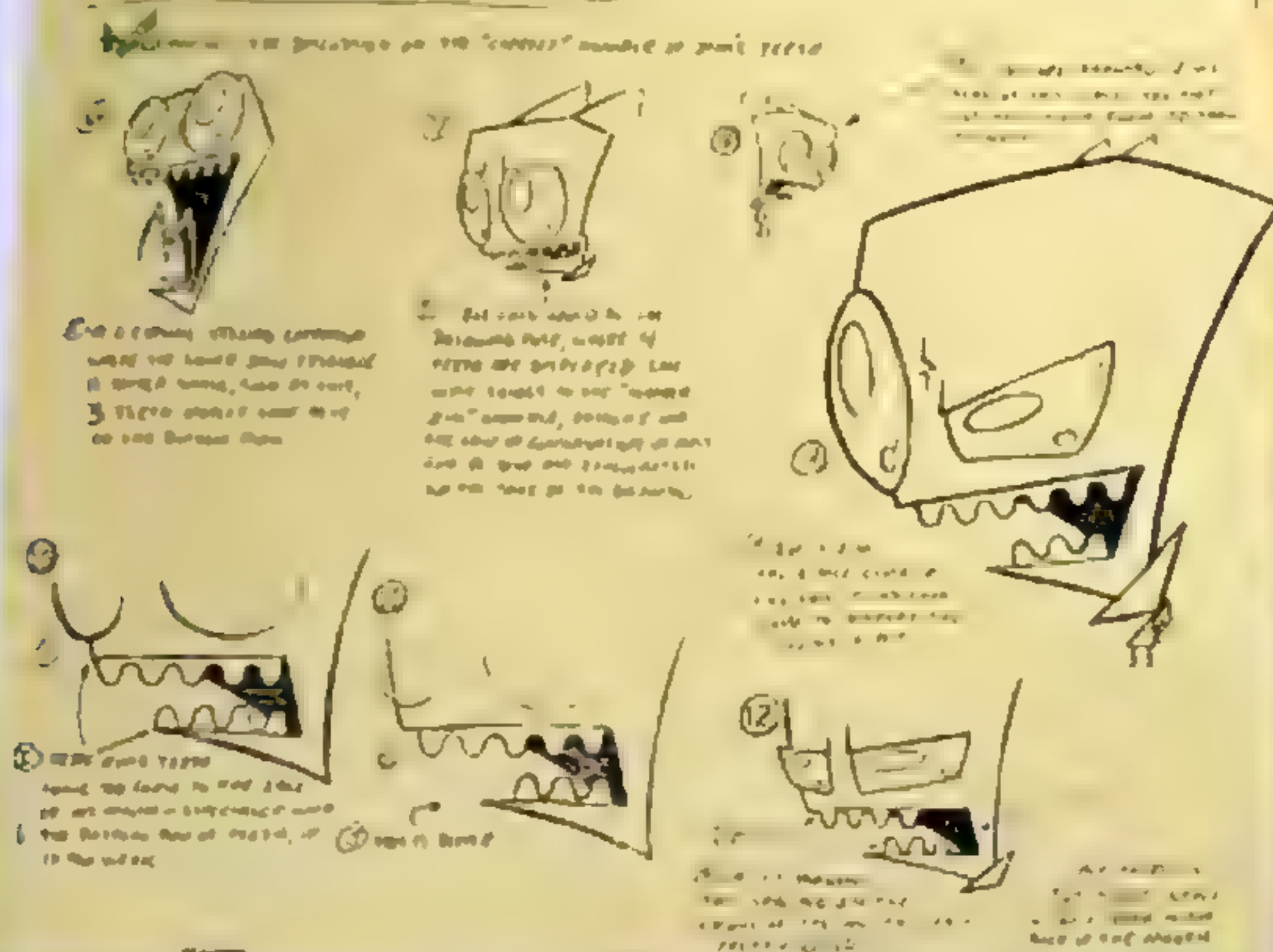
signature Zov style in their promotional materials. It's a study of how subtle variations in drawn character details make all the difference.



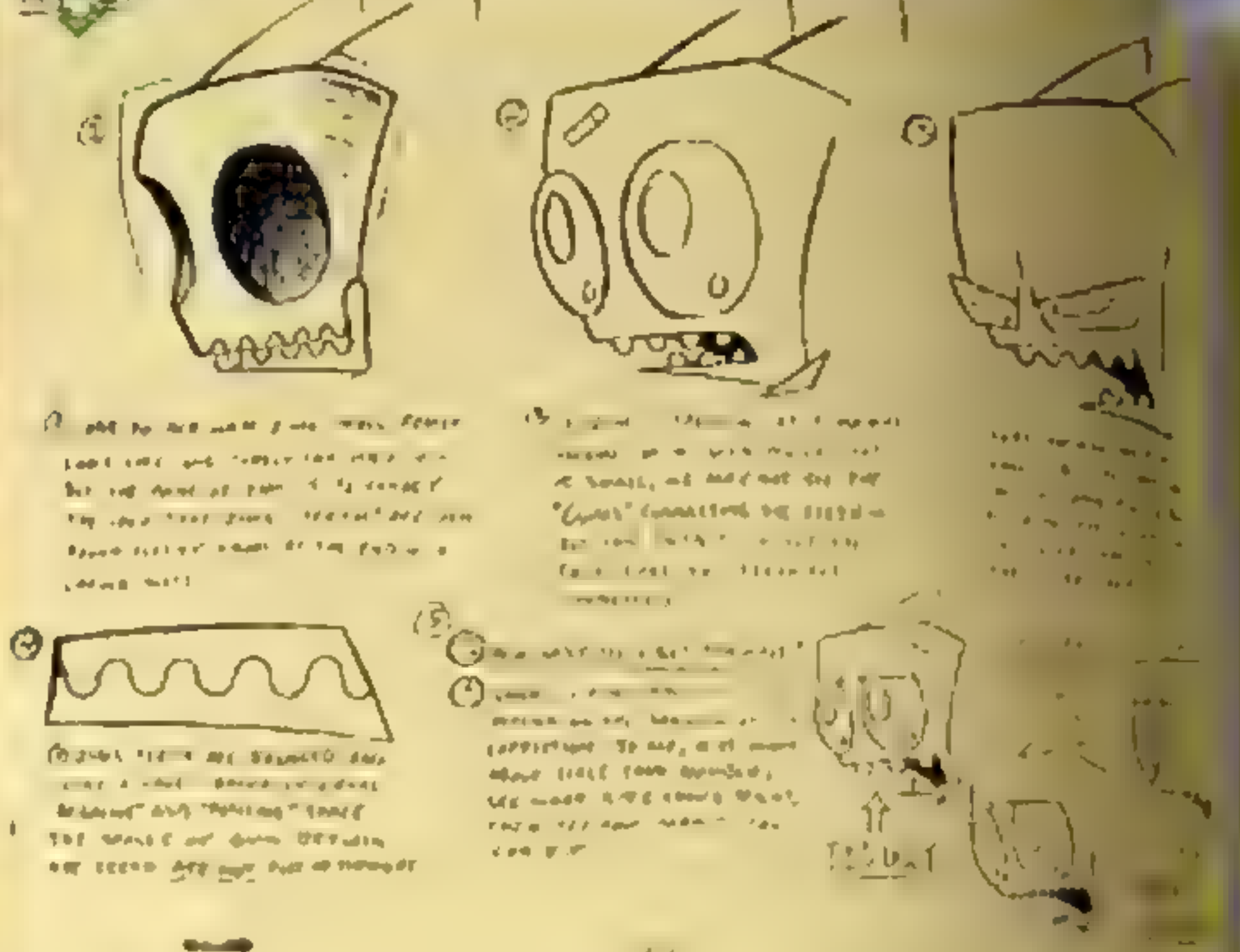
# LET'S GO TIME EYES



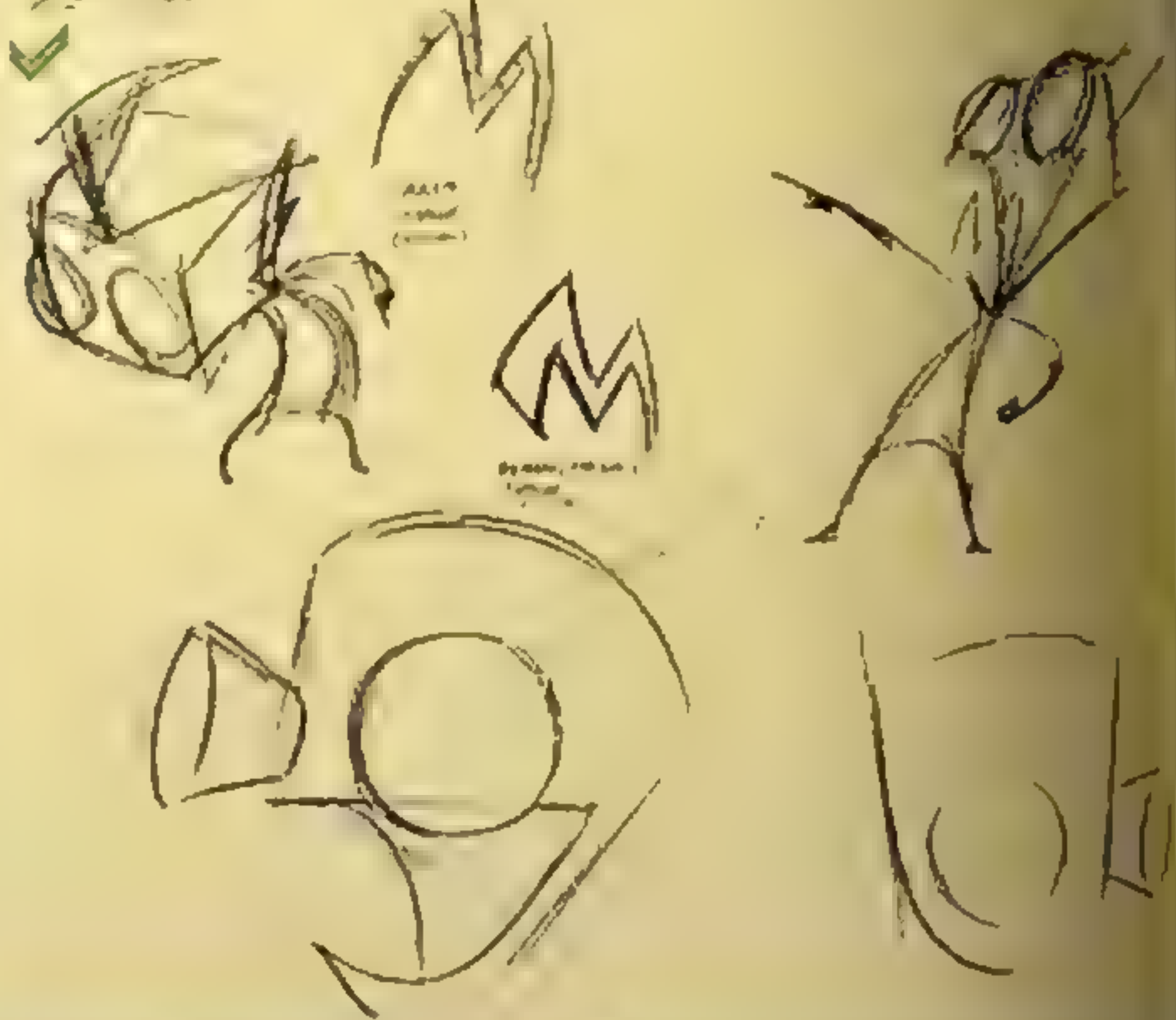
## THE KIND OF ZOO'S TEETH: PART (2)



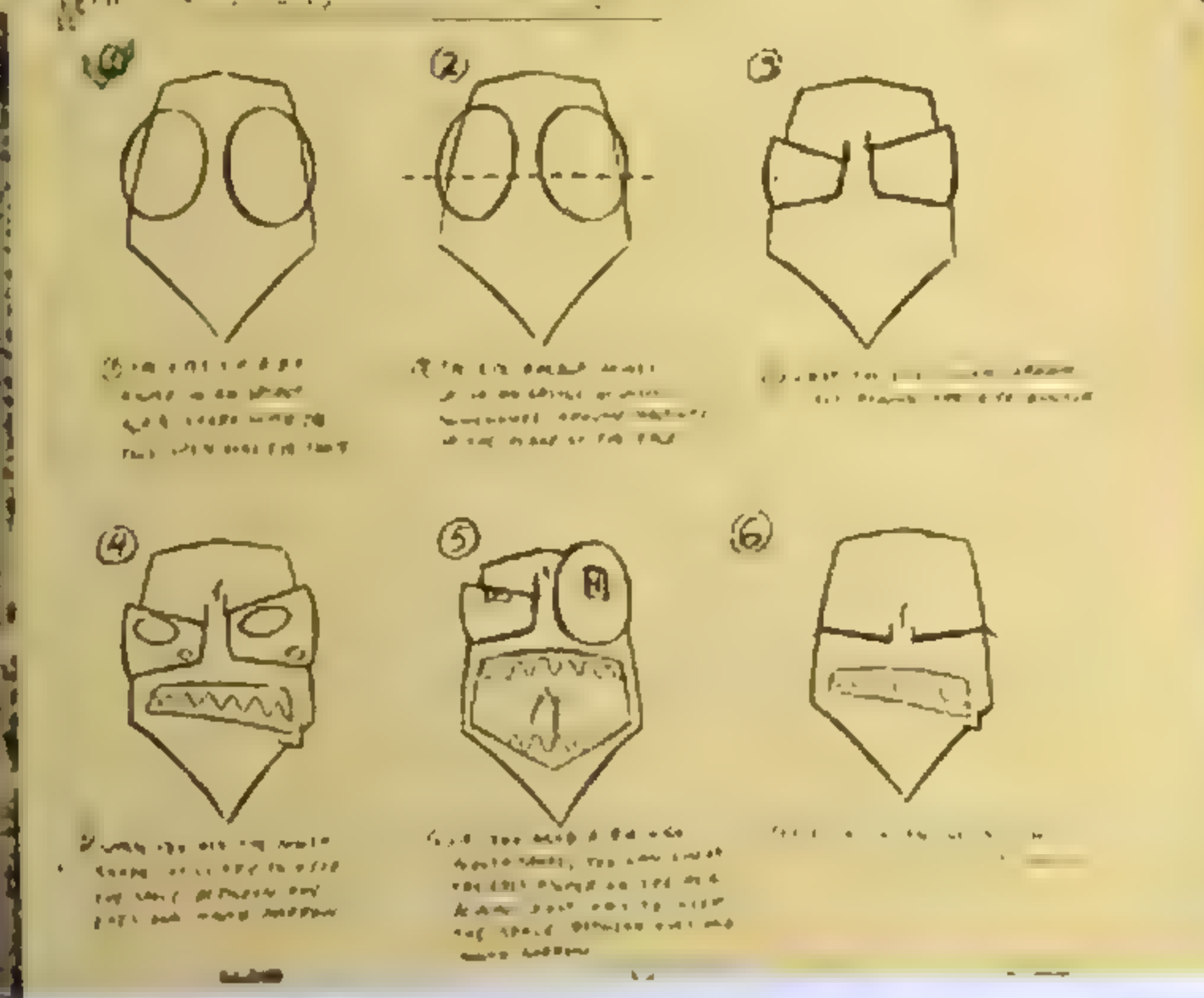
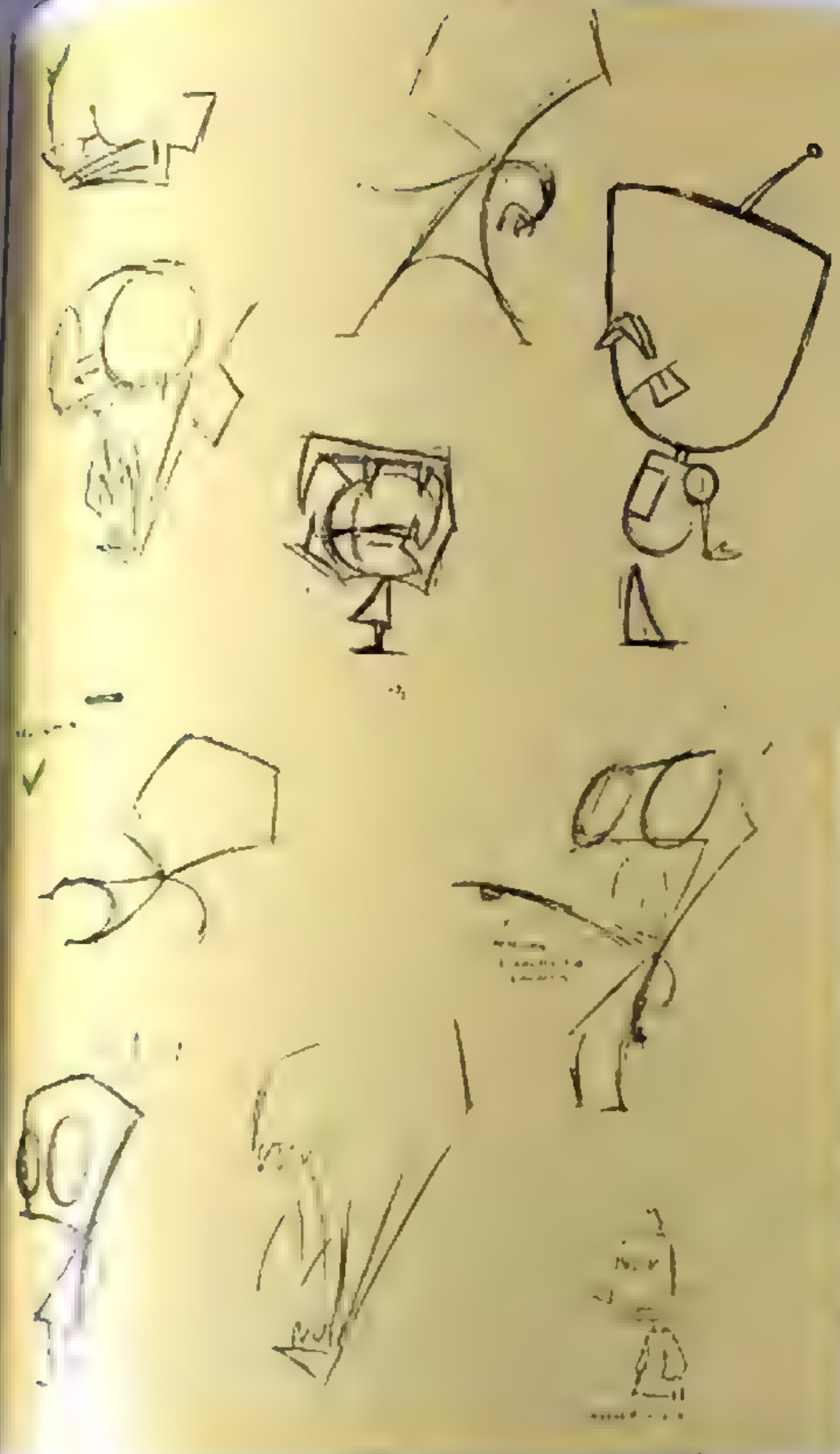
# PART 2



## SKETCHES



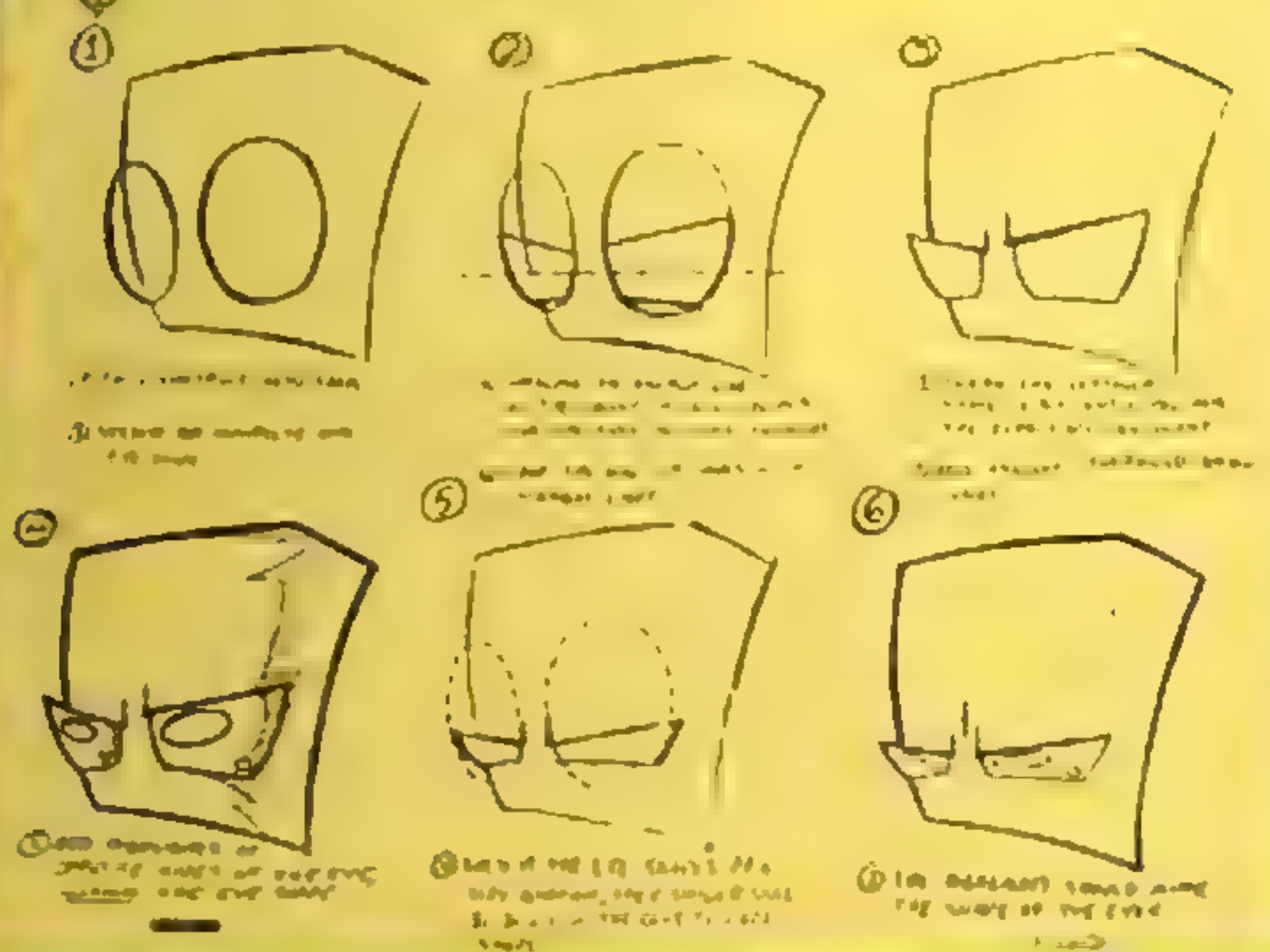




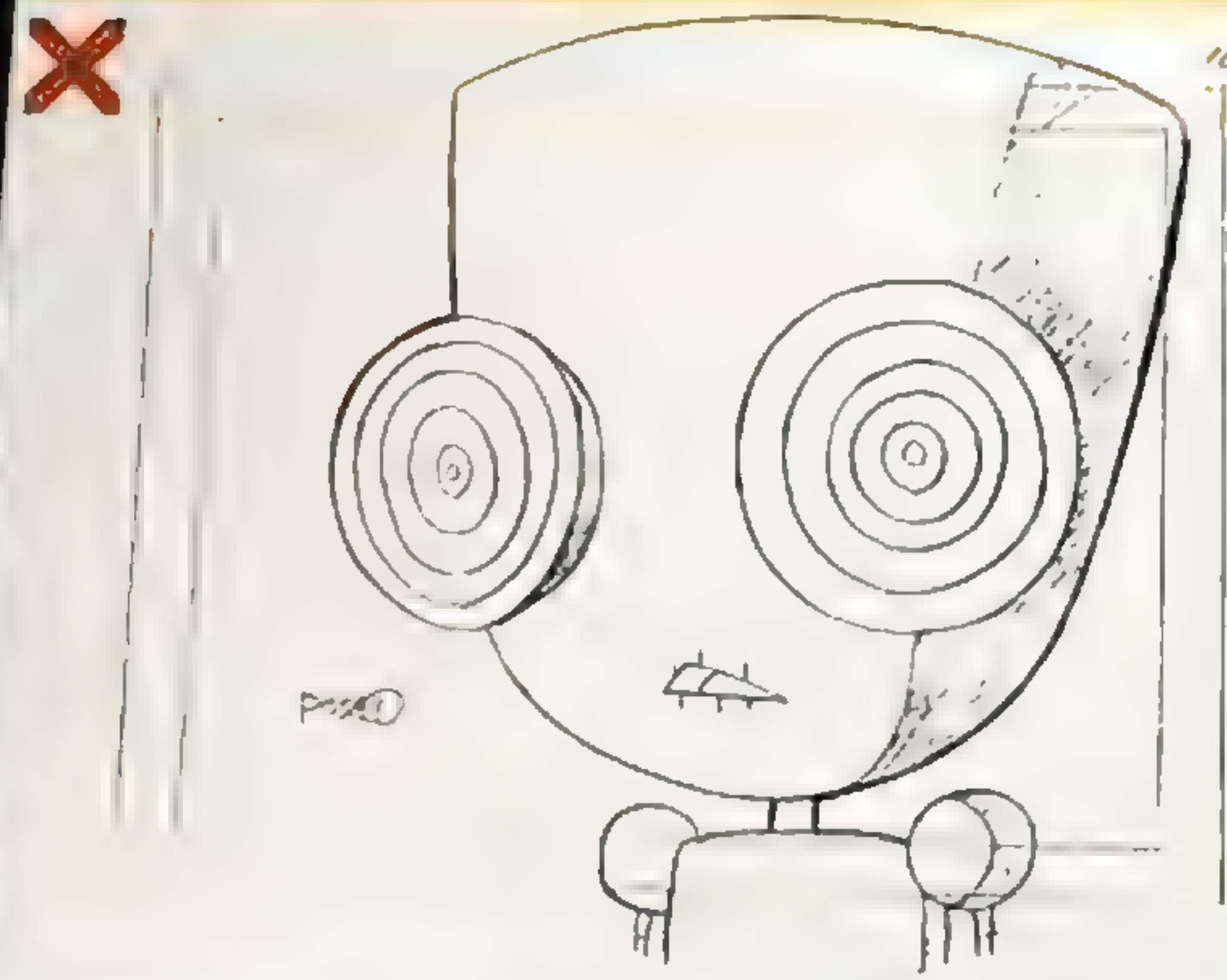
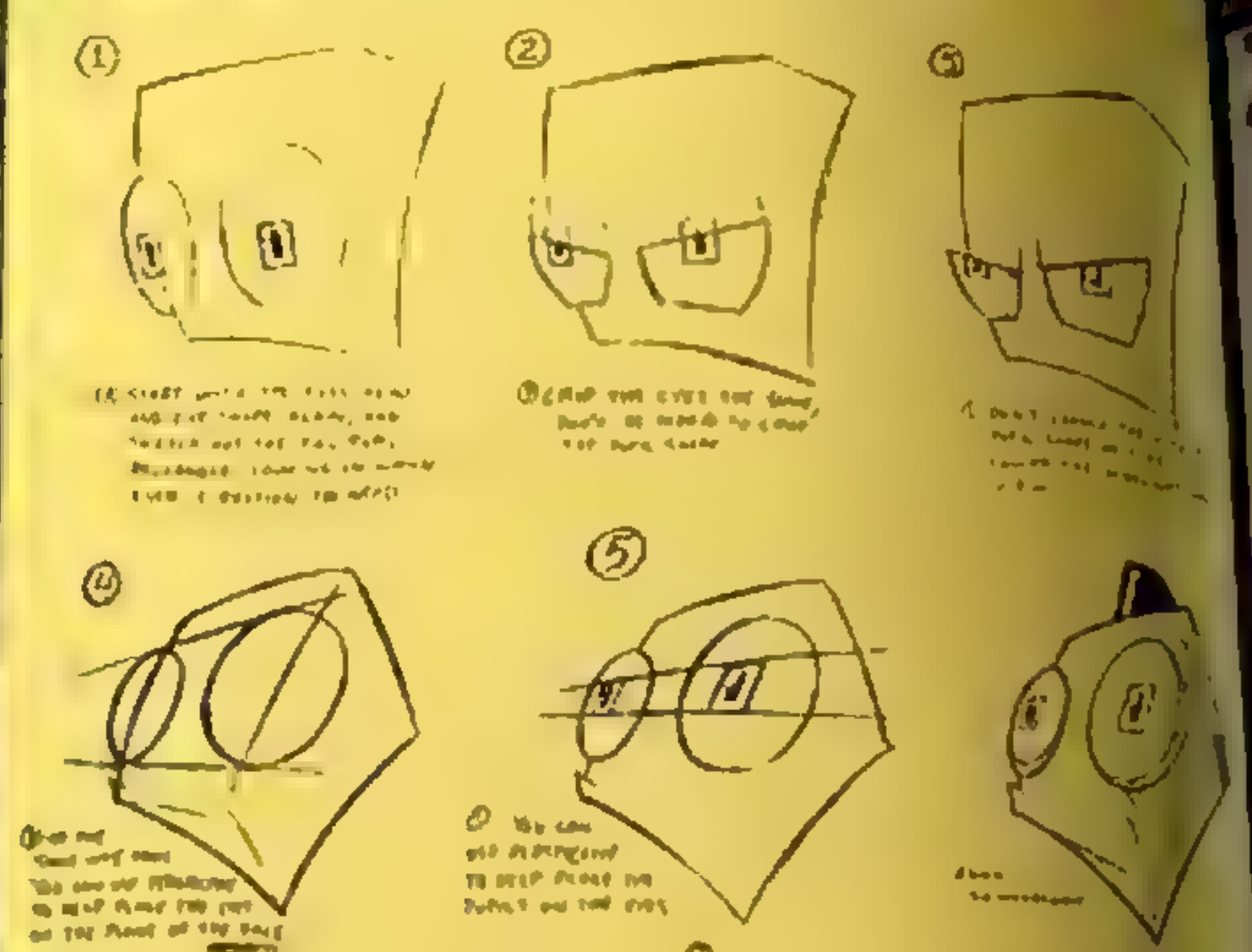
This spread: Continued selections from the character artists' reference material that Bryan Konietzko drew to help artists outside of the immediate crew.



# TIPS FOR DRAWING EYES WITH EXPRESSION



# TIPS FOR DRAWING PUPILS (WITH HALF-CLOSED EYES)



CHARACTER GUIDES







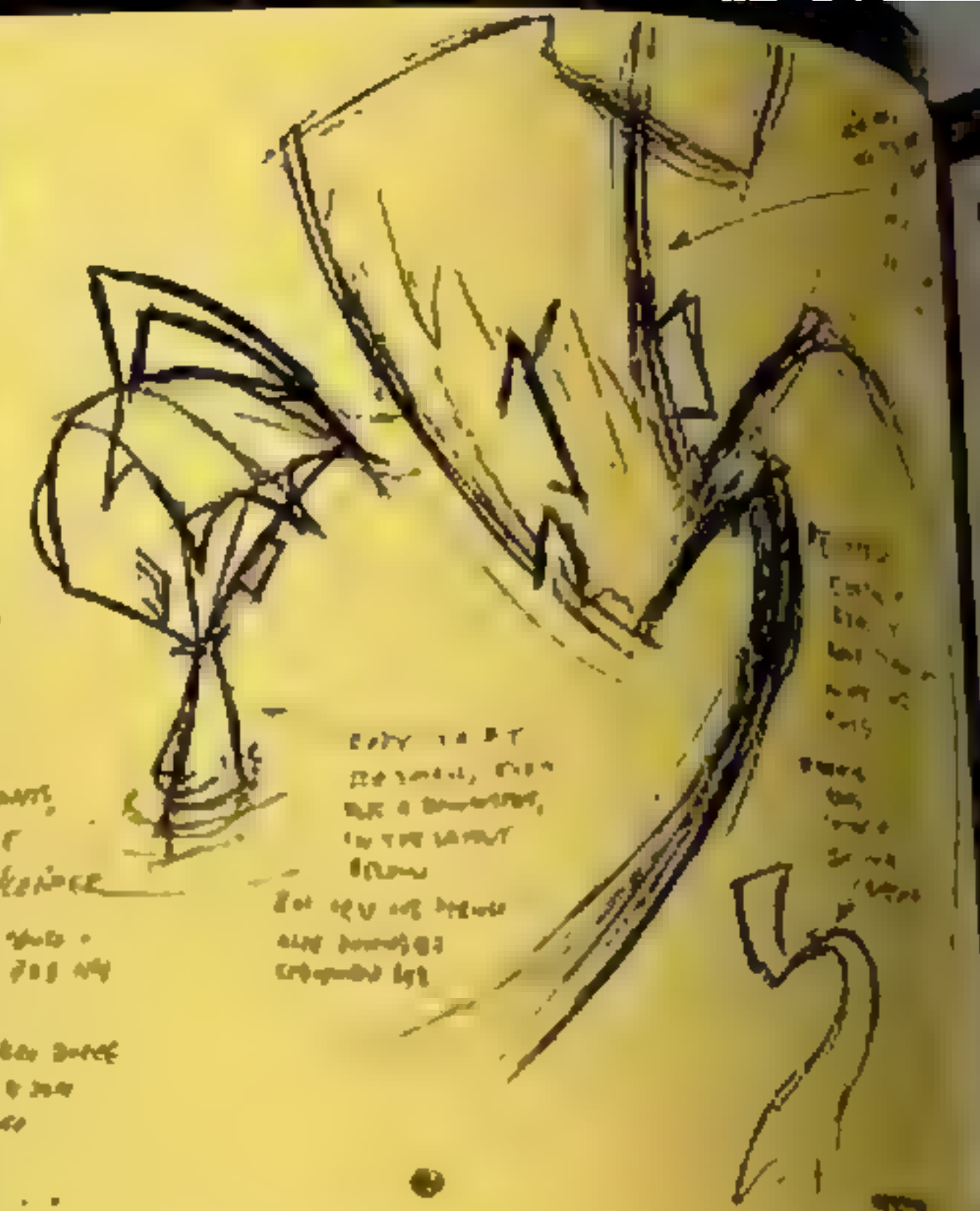


page 10 M C

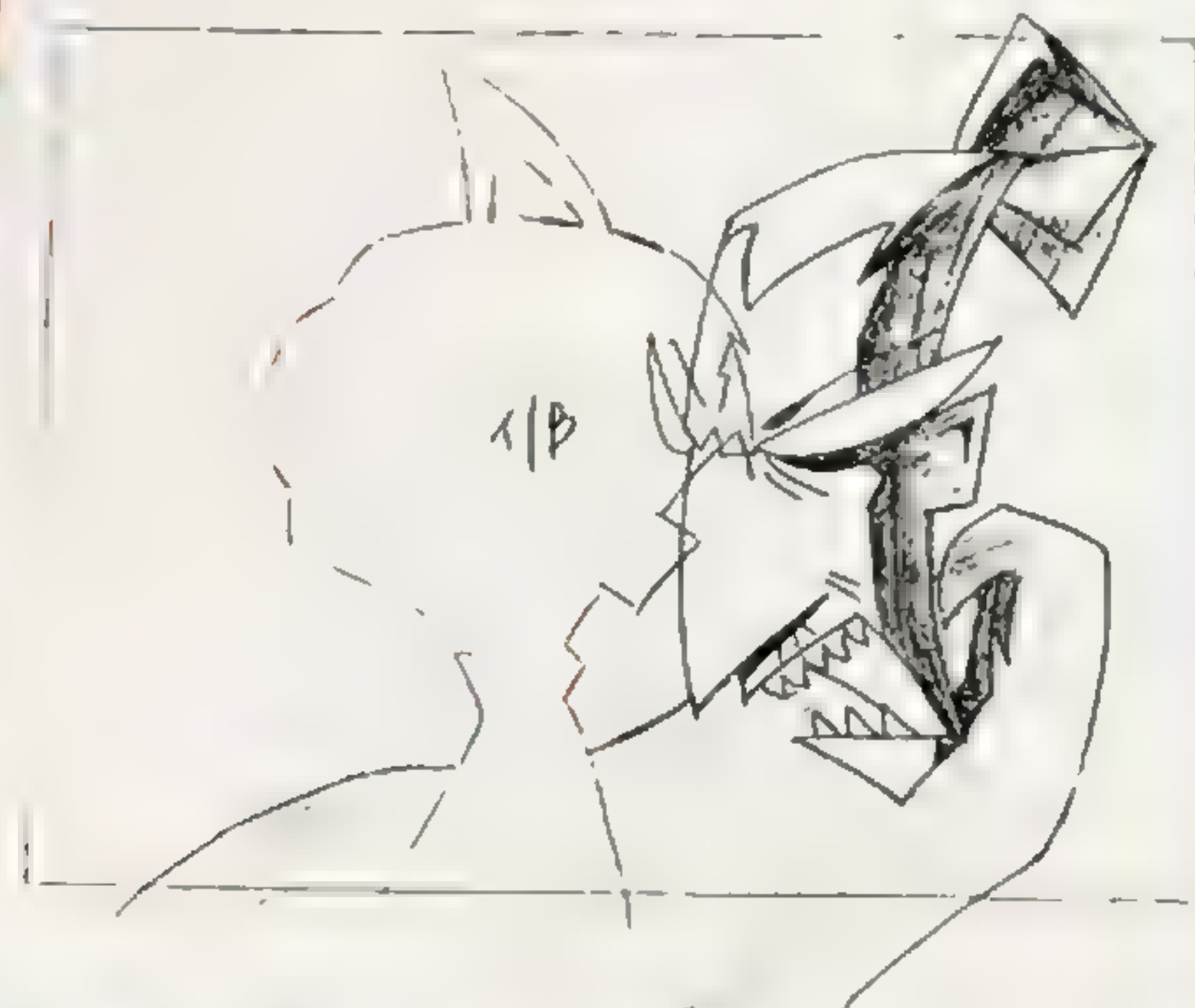


I KNOW THIS IS  
A TUGH ANGLE  
TO DRAW DIB AT-  
BUT IF YOU ALWAYS  
START WITH THE  
BASIC CONSTRUCTION-  
LIKE A BOX IN  
PERSPECTIVE- YOU  
WILL DO FINE

DIB'S HAIR HAS 5 PARTS,  
STARTING FROM THE  
TOP OF THE HEAD/NECK  
AND GOING OUT TO THE  
TIPS OF THE EARS  
AND THE TIPS OF THE  
EARS



EASY TO GET  
THE SHAPE, THEN  
ADD A SHADOW,  
TO THE SHAPE  
BELOW  
FOR THE HAIR  
AND SHADOWS  
BELOW THE  
HAIR



page 10 M C



WHEN AN ANGLES  
YOU THE  
BITTER'S HEAD SHAPE  
IS A TALL WEDGE,  
WIDEST AT THE TOP.  
HER EYES ARE THE PART  
AROUND THE ANGLE  
OF HER HEAD  
IS AN  
HIS AN  
SHE AN

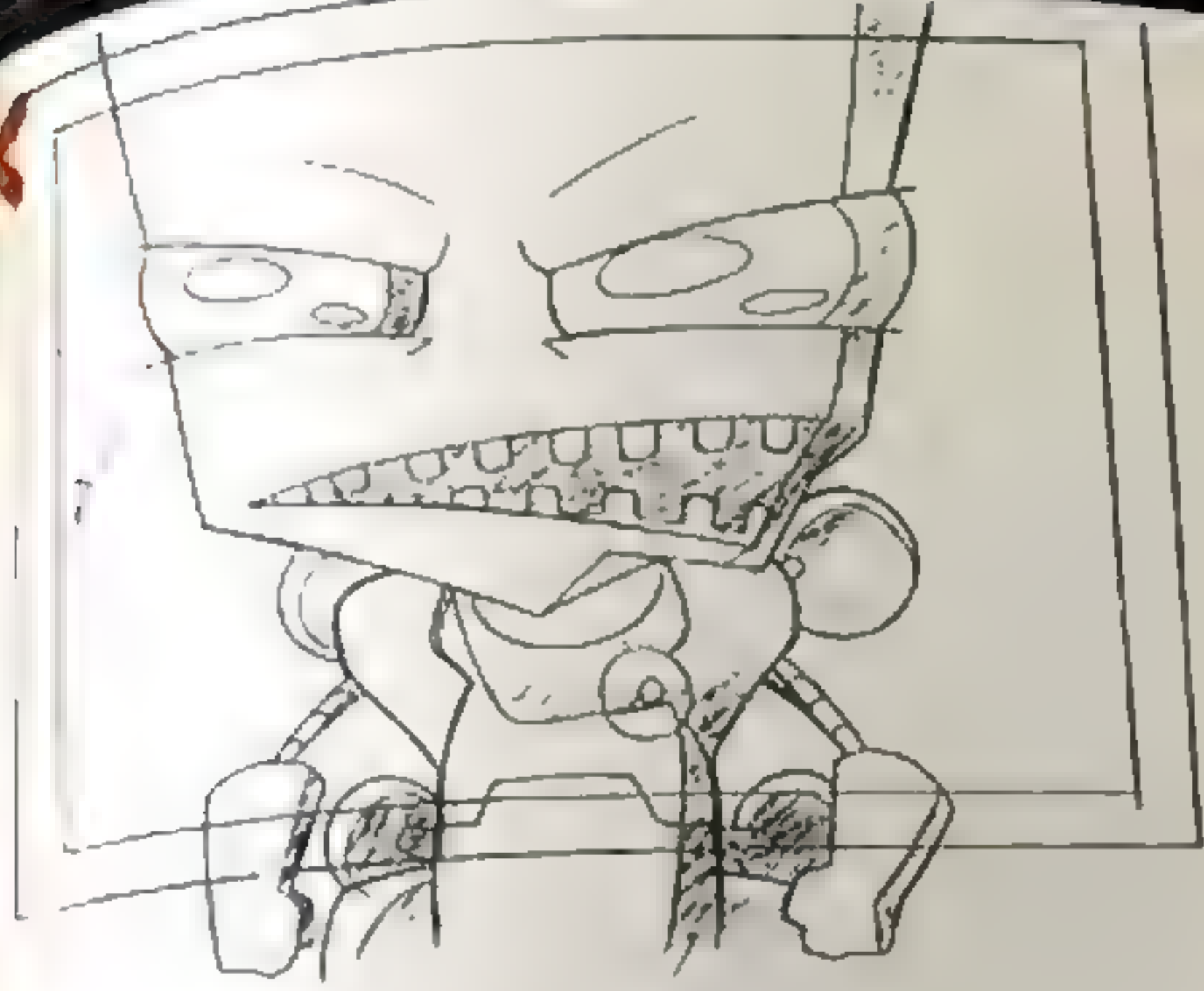
WILL BE MANY SHAPES  
THAT ARE THE  
TRY TO KEEP THE  
BODY SIMPLE-LIKE-THEN  
IF IT IS ANIMAL, IT SHOULD  
HAVE A TAIL, EARS  
AND IT IS- CREEPY!



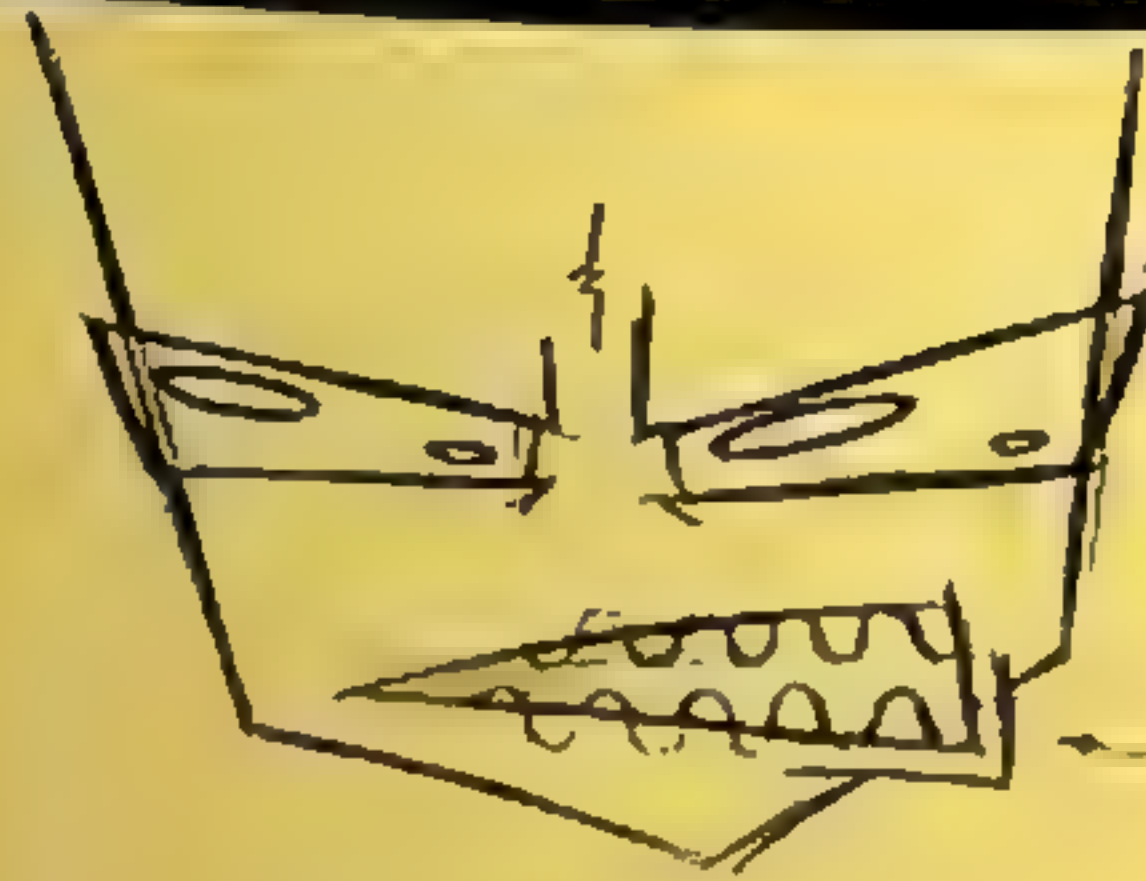
# CHARACTER GUIDES



X



9F



8 WE ARE TALKING TO  
DON'T PUT THE  
SKIN OVER EYES

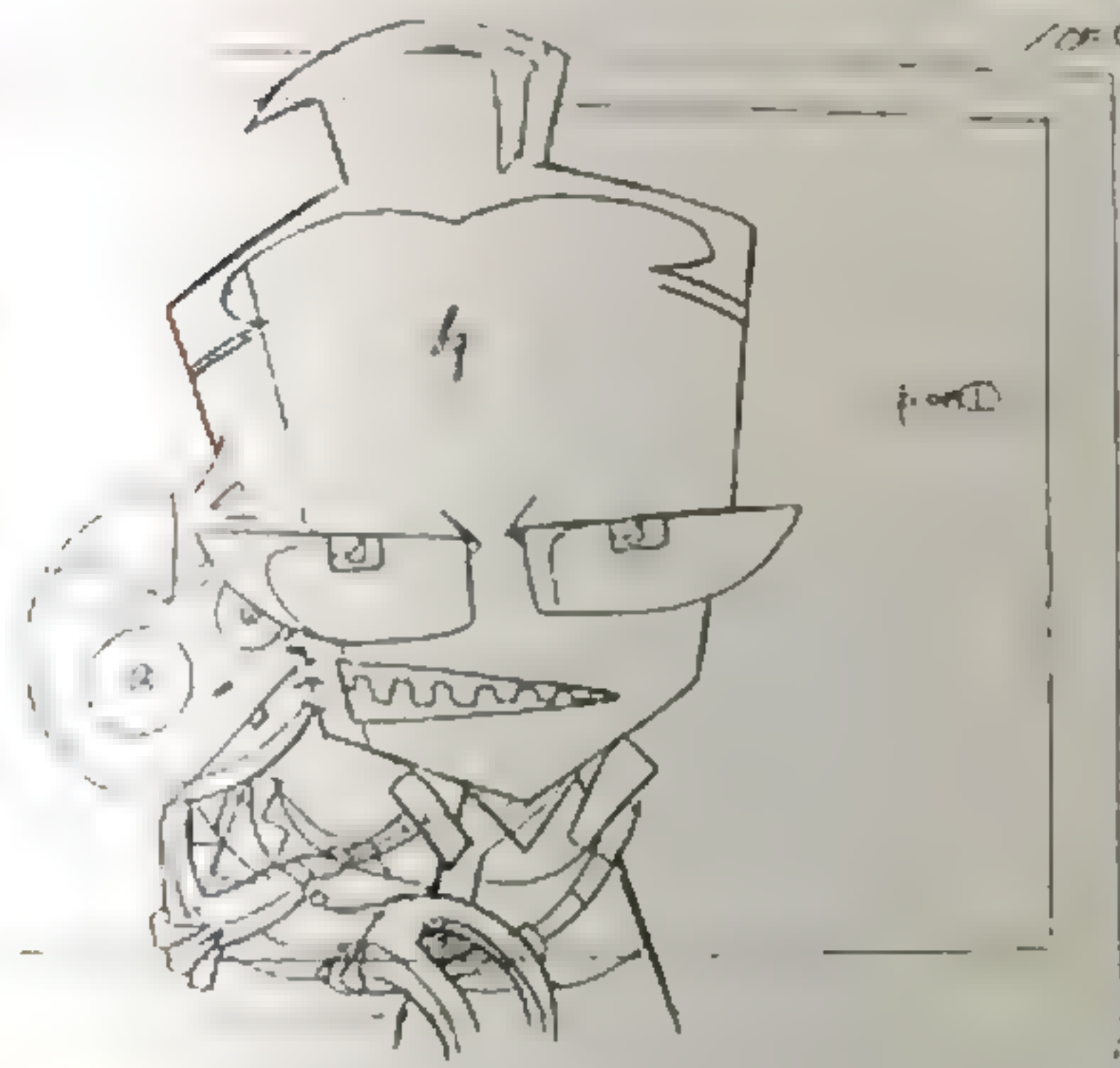
2. JUST THE EYES  
THE TAIL

IT THE MOUTH  
A GOOD TO PUT  
OUT, MAKE IT A  
RIGHT SIDE

OR  
WHERE THE BOTTOM  
LIP PUTS OUT FARTHER  
THAN THE TOP

BY THE WAY, WE HAVE  
THE EYES AND THE  
MOUTH - BY THE WAY  
THE EYES

X



10F



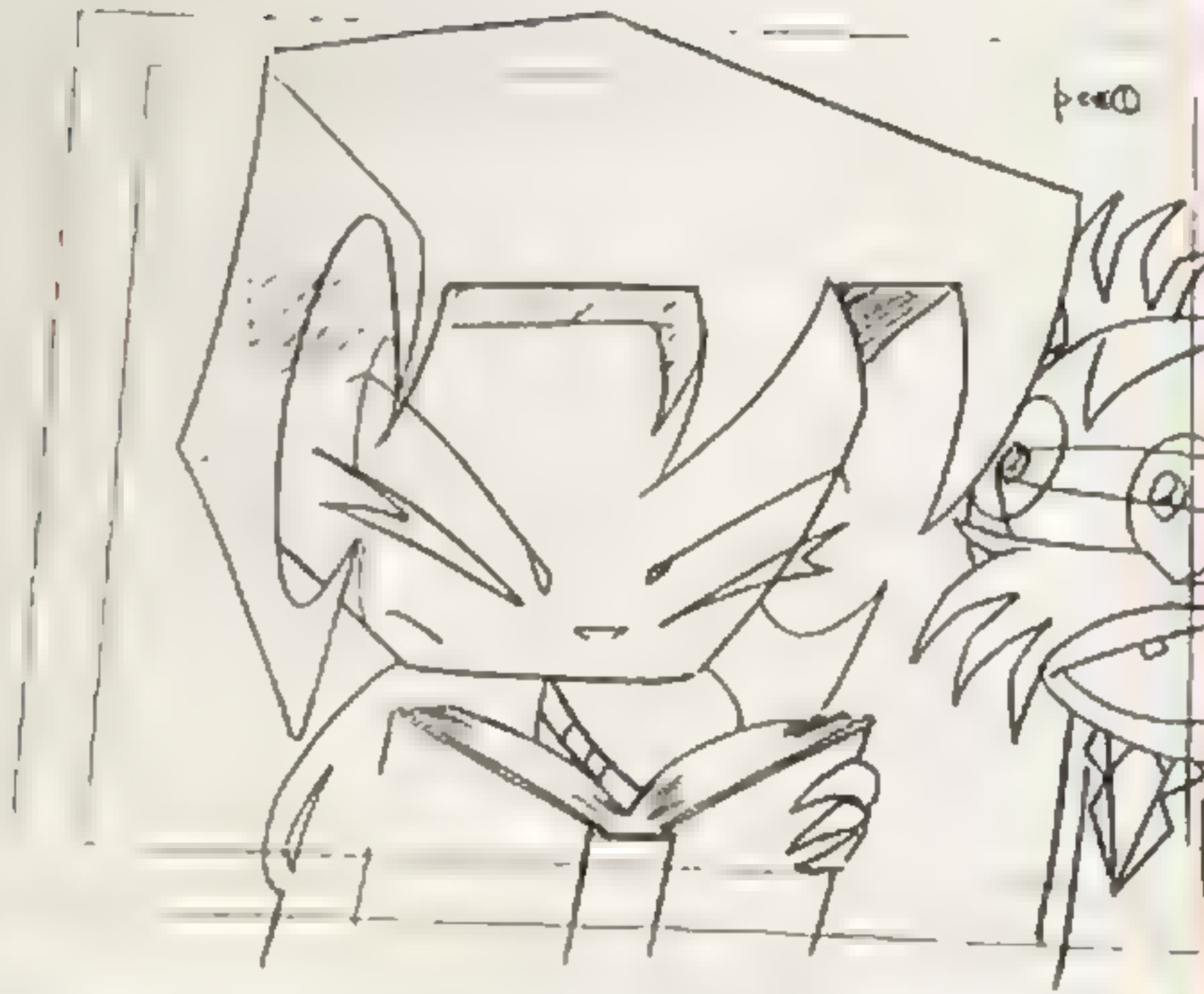
THE EYE  
LIP PUTS OUT  
MORE IN THE  
STYLE  
IT IS THE  
EYES AND THE

This spread: Selections from the Encyclopedia  
Zimtanica continued

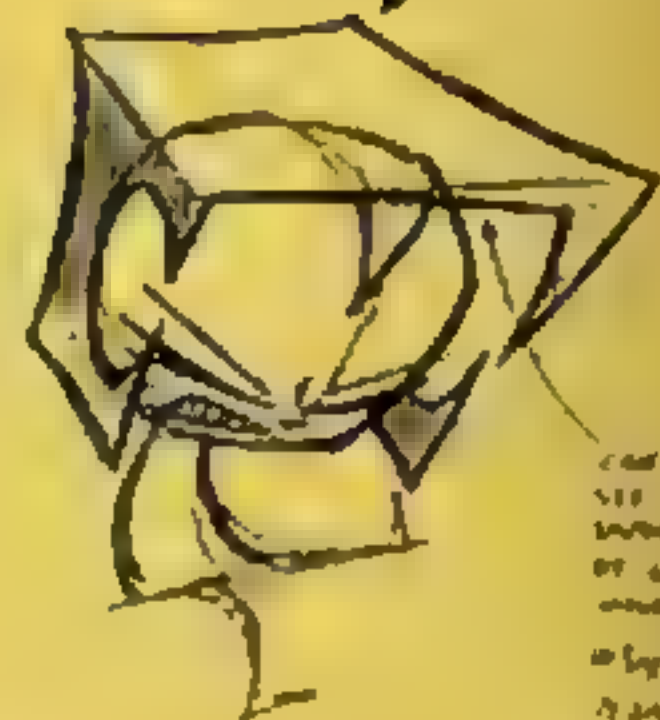




cat



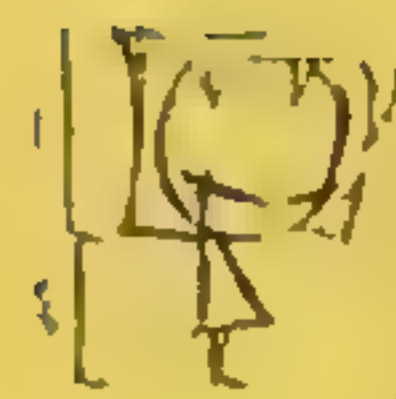
book



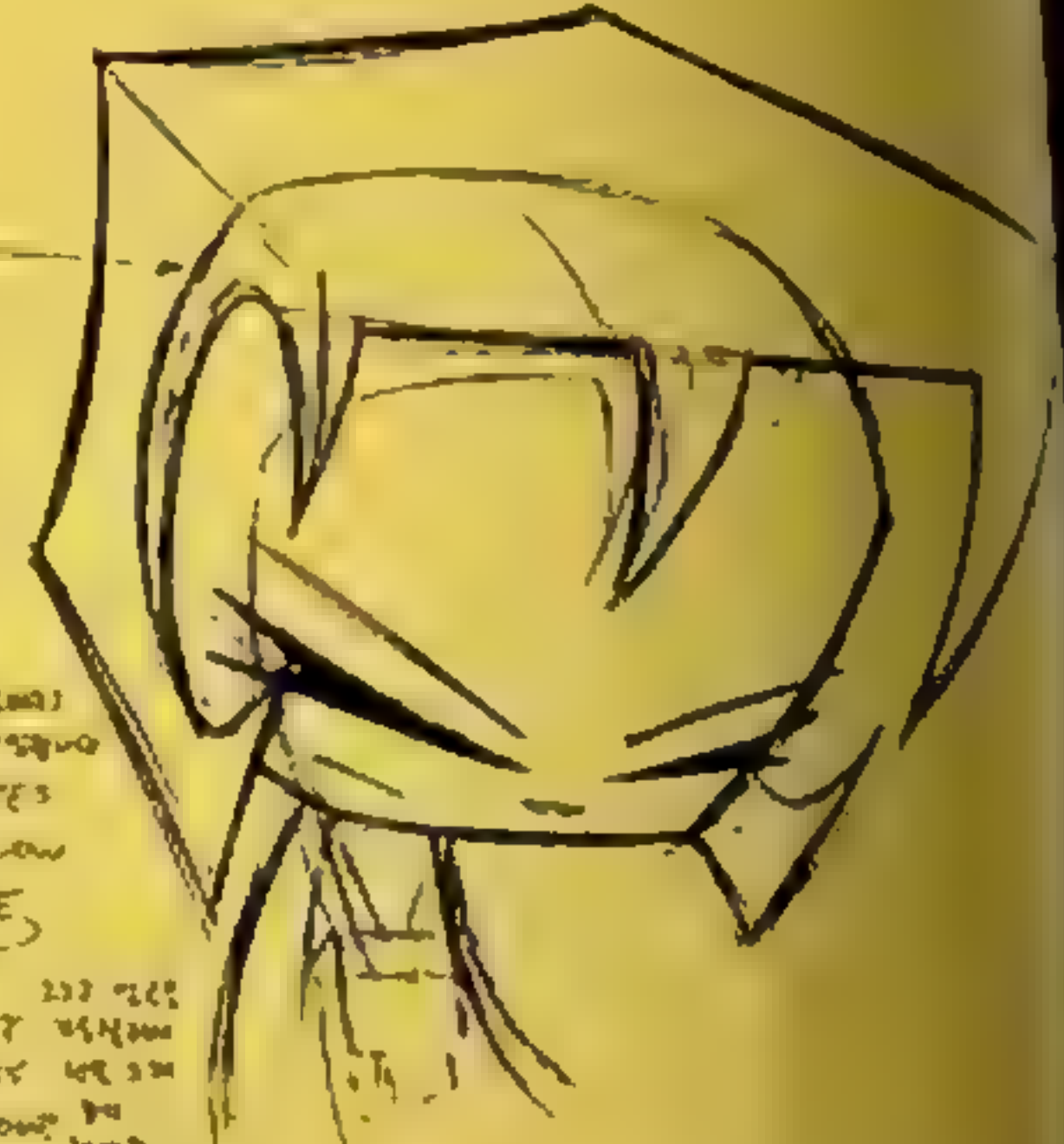
check the cat  
of cat's head shape is  
in the back - it's  
a cat shape



cat's  
the  
shape of cat's  
head is different  
from dog's  
shape of cat's  
head



REMEMBER!  
CAT IS NOT JEROME  
TALL AND THIN  
HE IS BOUNCY AND  
"MILKED" CUTE BODY!  
THINK! CAT IS FAT  
HE'S NOT AN ANIMAL  
HE'S A CAT OF THE  
FUTURE!



FULLY CONSTRUCT  
HEAD SHAPE BENEATH  
THE "TOW" OF THE  
HAIR. REVEN 222 0000  
THE 1224 000  
2224 000  
000000



THE HAIR OF CAT  
HE'S NOT A CAT  
CAT'S FEATURES  
SIT VERY LOW  
ON HER FACE

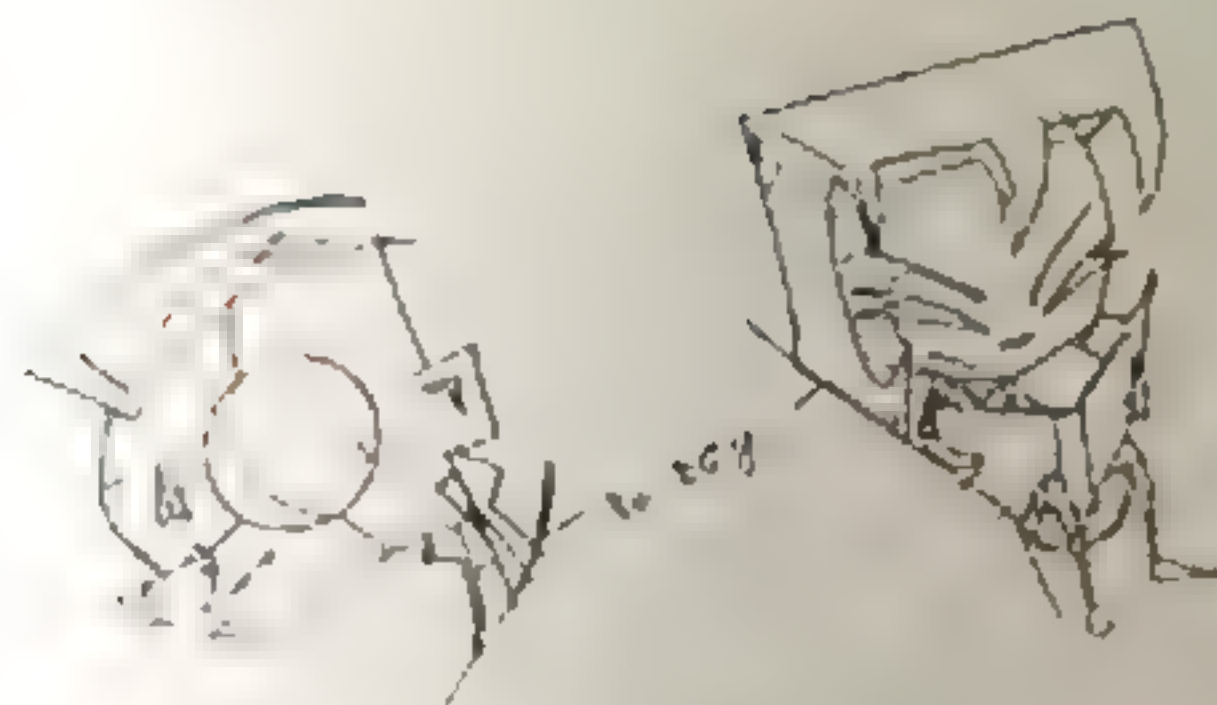


WRAP HER EYE  
SHAPE AROUND  
THE CIRCUMFERENCE  
OF HER FACE



CHARACTER GUIDES





page 1



USE THE HEAD AND  
THE SHOULDERS  
TO SHOW THE  
DYNAMIC POSE

THE HEAD AND  
SHOULDERS  
ARE THE MOST  
IMPORTANT  
PARTS OF THE  
FACE TO DRAW  
LIKE THIS

THE HEAD AND  
SHOULDERS  
ARE THE MOST  
IMPORTANT  
PARTS OF THE  
FACE TO DRAW  
LIKE THIS

**A GENERAL NOTE:** WITH THE LAYOUTS, PLEASE DO NOT APPLY  
CLEAN-UP & DRAW UP STORYBOARD PANEL AFTER, USE  
THE SKETCH UP DRAWING AS A STARTING POINT TO RE-COMMIT  
THE CHARACTERS UPON. REMEMBER THAT THE BOARD PANELS  
ARE SMALL, AND CHARACTERS' PROPORTIONS AND COMPOSITION  
CAN EASILY GET OFF-BALANCE AT THAT SCALE. IF YOU ALWAYS  
RE-COMMIT THE CHARACTERS, YOU CAN ENSURE THAT  
THE VARIOUS BOARD ARTISTS' PERSONAL STYLES WILL NOT  
LEAD YOUR LAYOUT AWAY.



page 2



USE THE HEAD AND  
THE SHOULDERS  
TO SHOW THE  
DYNAMIC POSE

**IMPORTANT:**  
- STRONGER COMPOSITION  
IS NEEDED, ESPECIALLY  
IN DYNAMIC ANGLES

LESS IS A NO  
A STRONG COMPOSITION  
IS NEEDED, ESPECIALLY  
IN DYNAMIC ANGLES



LESS IS A NO  
A STRONG COMPOSITION  
IS NEEDED, ESPECIALLY  
IN DYNAMIC ANGLES

This spread: Selections from the Encyclopedia  
Zamirah continued



113 AB "BATTLE OF THE PLANETS"

BACKGROUND LEVEL

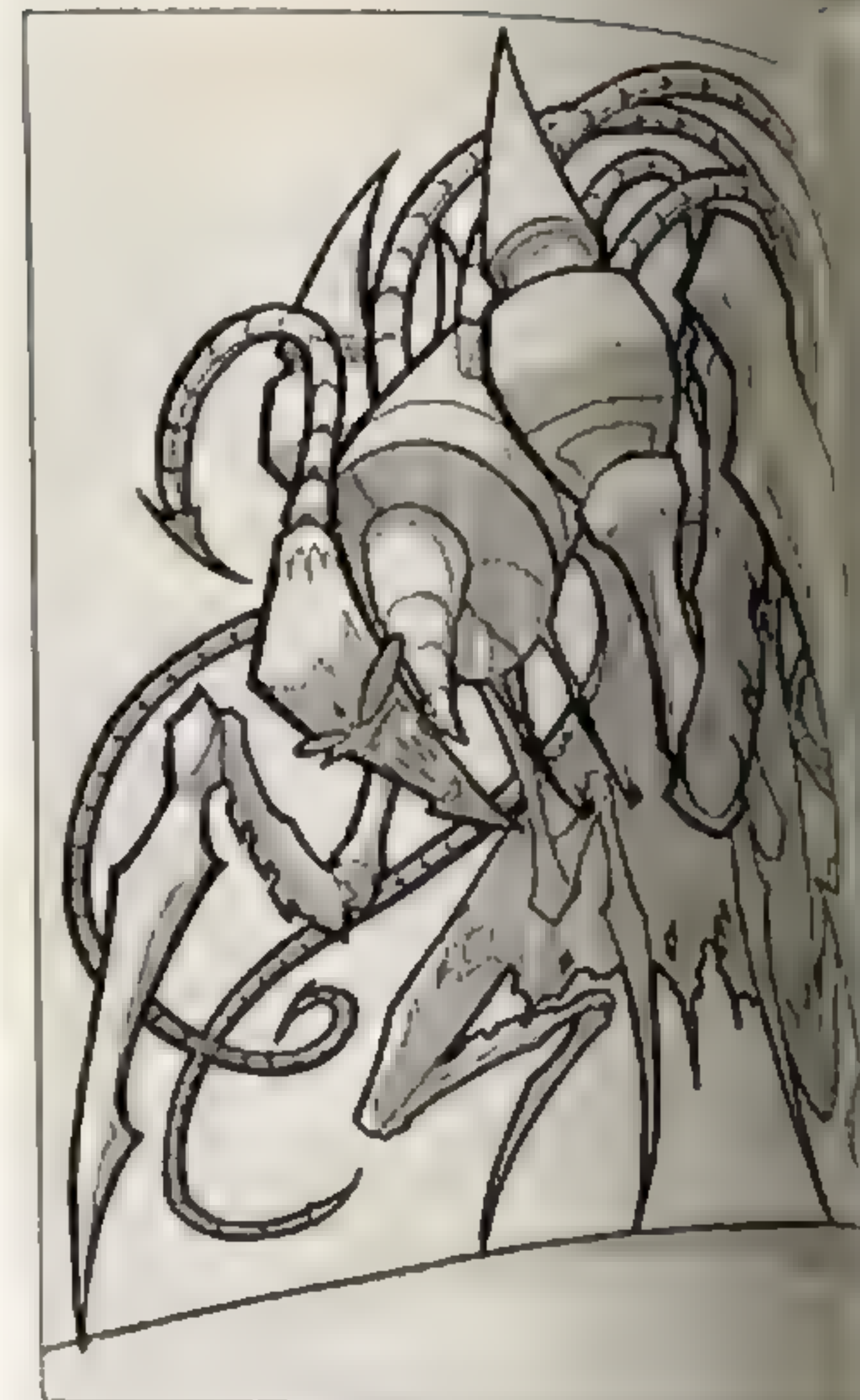
STAR  
(IN LIGHT)

CELESTIAL  
(IN LIGHT)



SPACE  
(IN LIGHT)  
IMPORT FILE  
FR. A 3 BODY

MERCURY  
(IN SHADOW)



116 AB "HALLOWEEN ALIEN" (BACKGROUND SHOULD STAR WHITE)



PROMO DRAWINGS

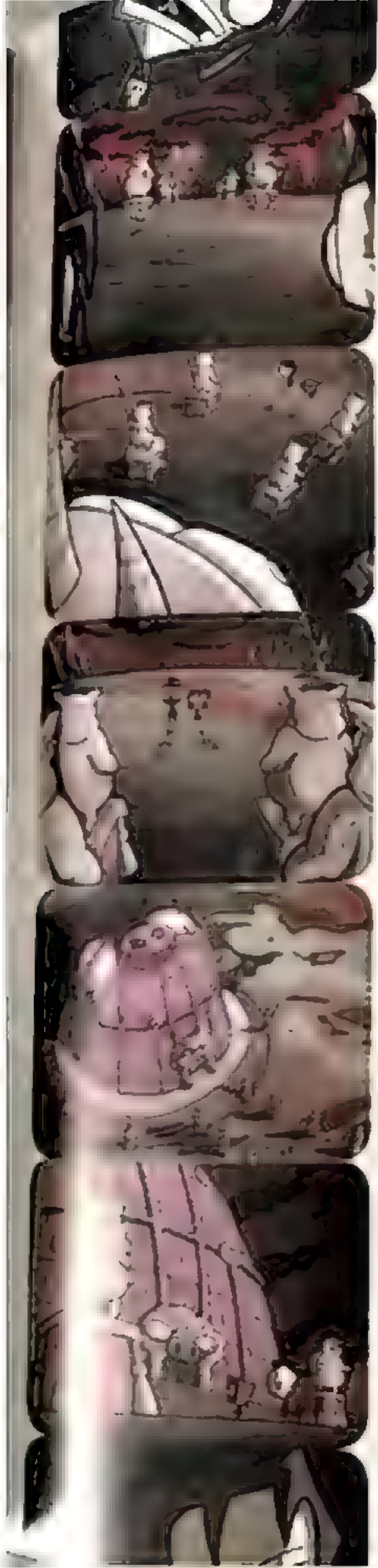












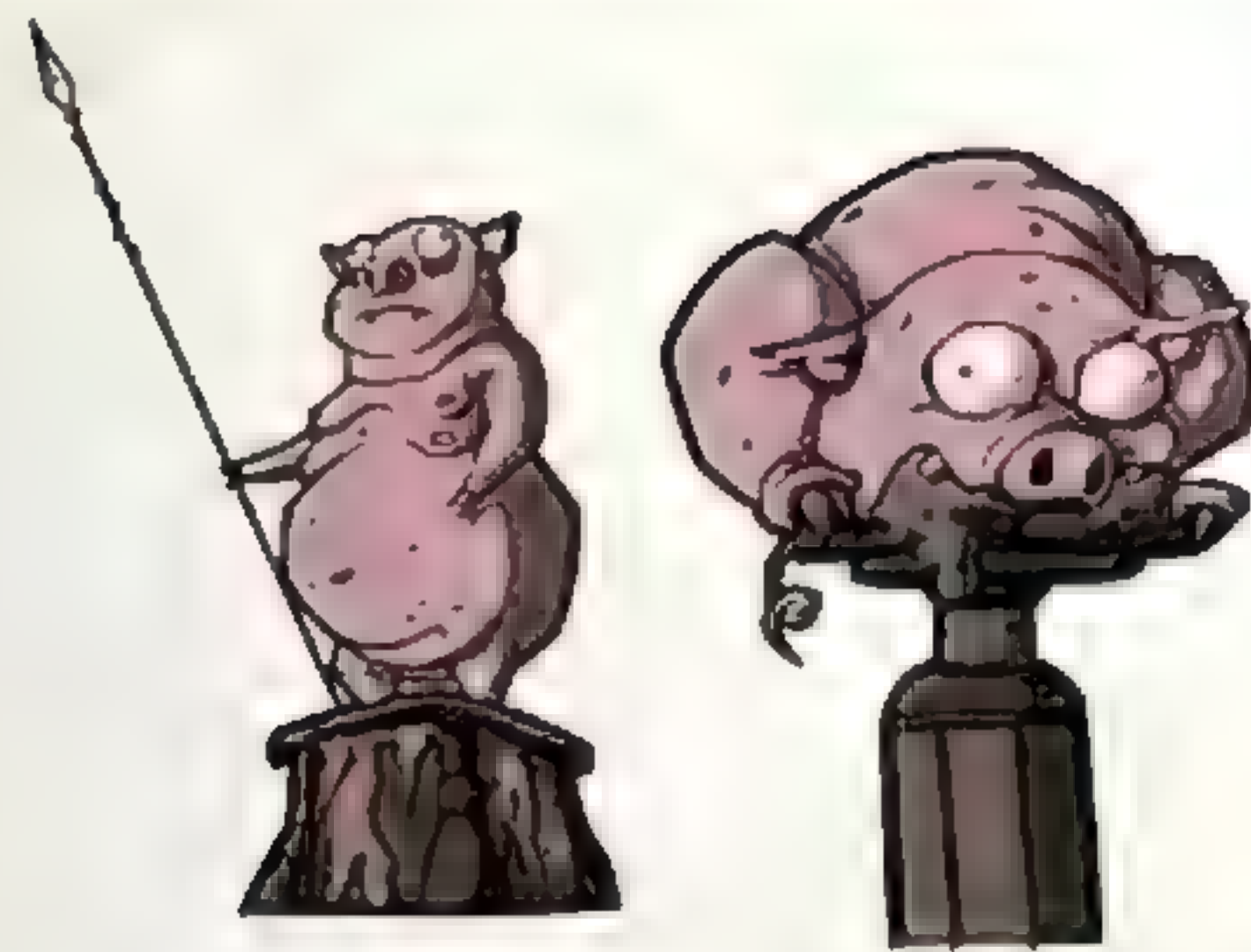
### 3: CONSTANT HORROR, UNENDING TERROR

#### WRITING AND DESIGNING THE STORIES OF ZIM

Some childhood experiences are especially formative, such as a special birthday party, a new puppy, or an alien spawn exploding out of actor John Hurt's chest cavity in a fountain of stage blood and butchered offal. Jhonon's love of horror and science fiction began at a tender age with his first viewing of Ridley Scott's *Alien*.

It wasn't just the experience of watching; Jhonon was aware of and fascinated by the fact that this was all manufactured, staged, acted. His fascination included an appreciation for the feeling of fear despite the awareness of the simulacrum of film. How was this made? How could these sounds and images elicit these primal reactions in viewers? How might he play in the same terrifying sandbox in the future?

**Jhonon Vasquez [series creator]:** The chest-burster scene scarred me, but I could not stop seeking out books or photographs of it or watching



the movie over and over again knowing that this is fake—that that's fake blood, that these are actors—and how amazing it is that these real reactions, fear, and adrenaline rush could be created from fake things. I guess it says a lot about why *Zim* is the way it is, [laughs] because it's a kids' show—a kids' show for the kid that I used to be.

My favorite stuff when I was a kid was the stuff that stayed with me. The stuff that kind of bugged me, that kind of upset me, and then I had to think about it and absorb it. I loved feeling that. It was like being on a roller coaster. And I would have nightmares.

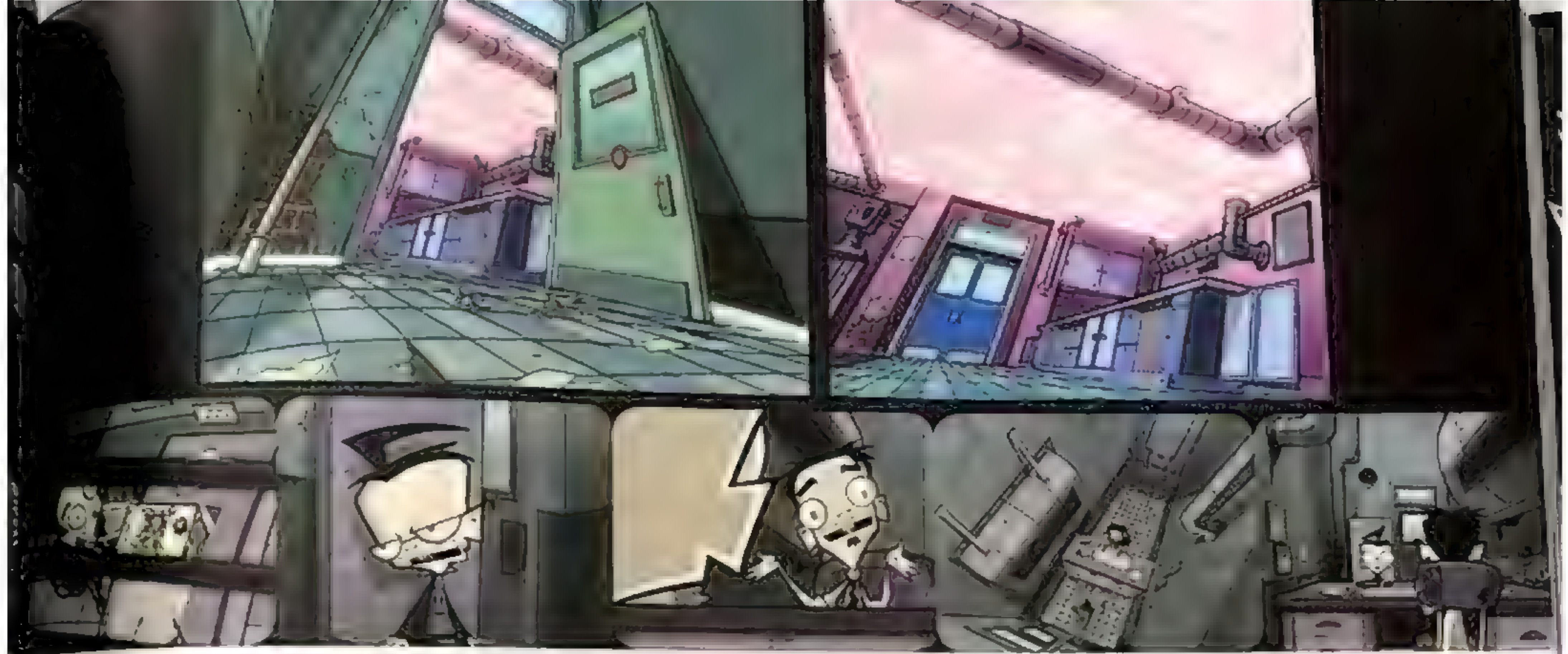
I loved things that messed with my little kid brain. Because I grew up with the typical Disney movies, when I saw any nontraditional animated stuff like the seventies Ralph Bakshi films—like his animated *The Lord of the Rings* and especially *Wizards*—or stuff in the eighties like *Lifeforce* or *Flight of the*

**This spread:** Dib and Gaz approach the impressive entrance to the realm of the Shadow Hog in "Gaz, Taster of Pork" (EP25)









...repeated for effects, and compositions with given objects overlapping the space—framing scenes with pipes, pipes, and machinery—were all elements created a live-action horror and science-fiction film.

Animated television productions typically try to limit these special touches to standout sequences and rely on simpler and more reusable shot designs for the rest of the episode, for efficiency. These choices were informed by the crew's enthusiasm for the films that they loved. There were, of course, consequences

**Louie del Carmen [storyboard supervisor]:** There was a lot of swagger and exuberance in the shot choices, and the shot count in the show is insane. We did it because we could.

It was also a living hell. For example, inevitably, in every show there's a scene in Ms. Bitters's classroom.

We must have ten thousand backgrounds of the same location. We'd be like, "Hey can we reuse this existing background?" and then, "Ah, it's almost there, but it's tilted enough that it's not working, so we can't use that as a direct layout." And then it was, "Okay, so we'll have to get someone to draw a new layout of that background from five degrees to the left!"

And then there's Zim's lair. Zim's lair never looks the same way twice. Zim's lair is nebulous. He has unlimited resources to play with. Of course, that meant unlimited background layouts to sketch, pencil, ink, and paint.

### Darkness

Because they were playing with this potentially volatile subject matter, sometimes Jhonson and crew were surprised not by what was rejected by the studio standards and practices department, but by what was allowed.

A particularly gruesome episode, "Dark Harvest" (EP4B), was a horror show. After being hit in the guts this "big feedillyspooch!" during a schoolyard game of dodgeball, then contracting head-pigeons (a pigeon landed on his head in class), Zim is sent to the school nurse by Ms. Bitters. Dib is delighted, telling Zim on his way out that the nurse will quickly realize that Zim is an alien because of his lack of human organs, and from there it wouldn't be long before Zim is flayed open on a top secret government autopsy table. Zim, however, is confident. Before leaving class, Ms. Bitters assigns Zim a hall pass.

**Ms. Bitters:** No leaving the class without a hall pass, Zim. If you leave school grounds, it will explode.

*Ms. Bitters fits Zim with a deadly exploding tracking-collar hall pass. As he roams the School, Zim begins the Dark Harvest.*

(Continued on page 100)

...the ... of ... and expected ... again ... throughout a sequence. Not on Zim!

Made with "swagger and exuberance" is an excellent way to describe the shot choices as Louie del Carmen does above.





CINEMATIC SHOTS





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K-1 B



1258

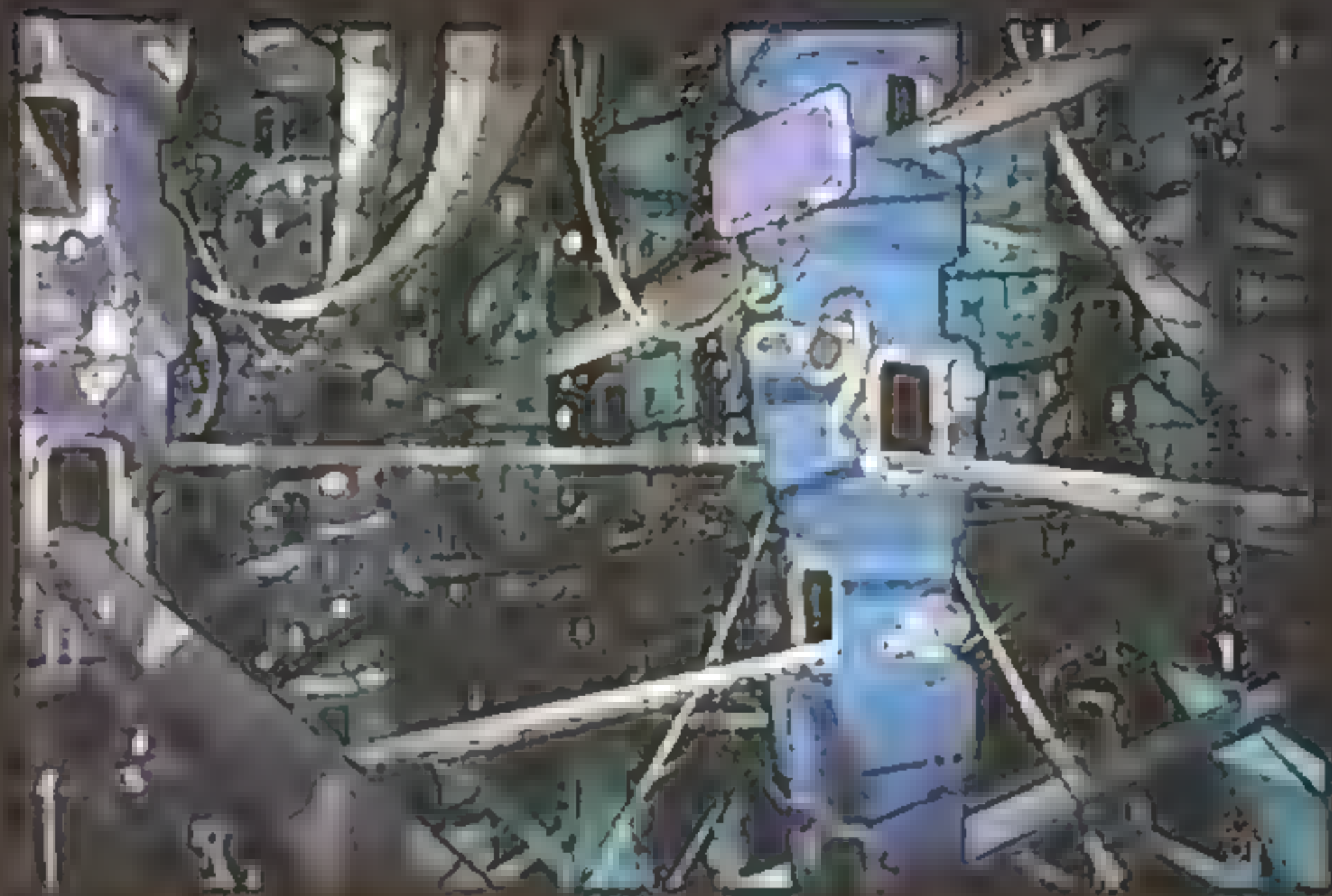


Exhibit 107A 107A 107A 107A



NIGHT

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**Zim:** Say... you're full of organs, aren't you?

**Hall monitor:** Why yes, yes I am.

**Zim:** And you wouldn't notice if you were, say, missing a few?

**Hall monitor:** Probably not!

**Zim:** [Grins at computer]

Just before the final battle, Zim is staging a built-up with a special and disputed on a makeshift wall where Zim harvests organs from the hall monitor with his bio-scientific appendages. When the hall monitor is taken back to his room, the camera film a broad cutaway shot of Zim in his belly button, past an arrangement of fat, and fully enters his abdomen through a long, tortuous, fluid-lined passage, not unlike a colonoscopy video, several comically moving organs.

In "Bad, Bad Rubber Piggies" (EP2B), Zim created a faster, tougher robot to send to the past

to destroy, once and for all, the primary threat to his mission: Dib. When that plan fails, Zim keeps sending rubber pigs to the past through a space-time object replacement device, to degrade Dib's present. Because, of course, it's an inexact science, when objects are replaced in the past with rubber piggies, unusual, unforeseen side effects occur in the present, ranging from giant fish people in bear suits rampaging through Tokyo to the creation of the Bloaty's Pizza Hog restaurant chain.

The darkness of this episode lies in the slow-motion, torturous murder Zim is inflicting upon Dib, despite the hilariousness of using rubber piggies to achieve it. Dib, after suffering multiple piggy-related traumas, now has purple skin welts, a limp, missing teeth, a claw hand, and neck-tubes hooked up to a ventilator. After a final round of rubber-piggy object-replacement, rubber pigs replace the EMT's defibrillator nodes as

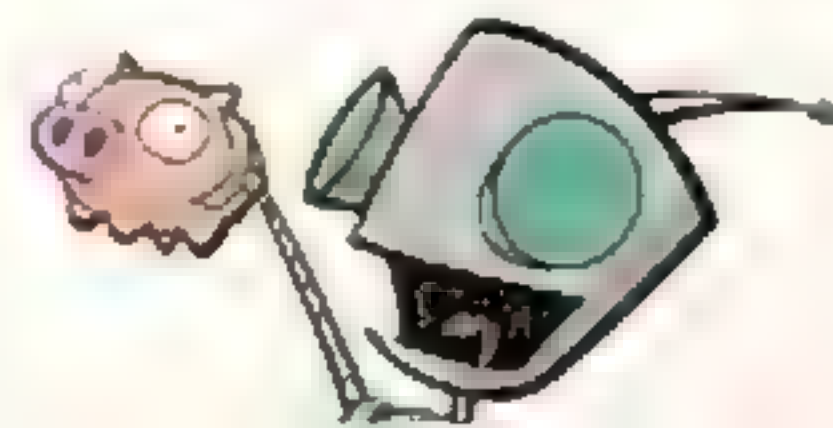
he tries to revive Dib's tragically broken body. Zim succeeds in stuffing out Dib in the past.

But... Zim's plan is thwarted by unforeseen consequences. With the power of science, Professor Membrane revives his son by creating the Mega-Bot (with fusion-powered titanium exoskeleton) possessing the strength of ten thousand little boys and ready for revenge. And with that, you have the Zim version of a happy ending. Or something to that effect.

In some cases, storyboard artists anticipating a showdown with standards and practices over some particularly upsetting scenario would get about the problem with creative staging of the action. In the aforementioned organ harvesting. For example, in the second episode of *Zim*, "Bestest Friend" (EP2A), Zim extracts the eyeballs of a kid with robotic claws to replace them with cybernetic orbs.

Abstract: Screened from the episode "Bad, Bad Rubber Piggies" (EP2B), where Zim secretly tortures his hapless Dib by having to locate

them, consequences: a revived super Dib bent on revenge created by Professor Membrane.







**Jhonen:** I don't think tearing Keel's eyes out was an issue [laughs]

**Chris Graham:** No. And that was my first "I can't believe I'm getting to do this" moment. The offscreen shadow staging of it came from my self-editing, meaning, "I can't show this, so I'm going to do it this way—which is actually cooler."

It was a classic directorial choice that filmmakers have used to build tension and suspense since the dawn of cinema.

## Aural Nightmares

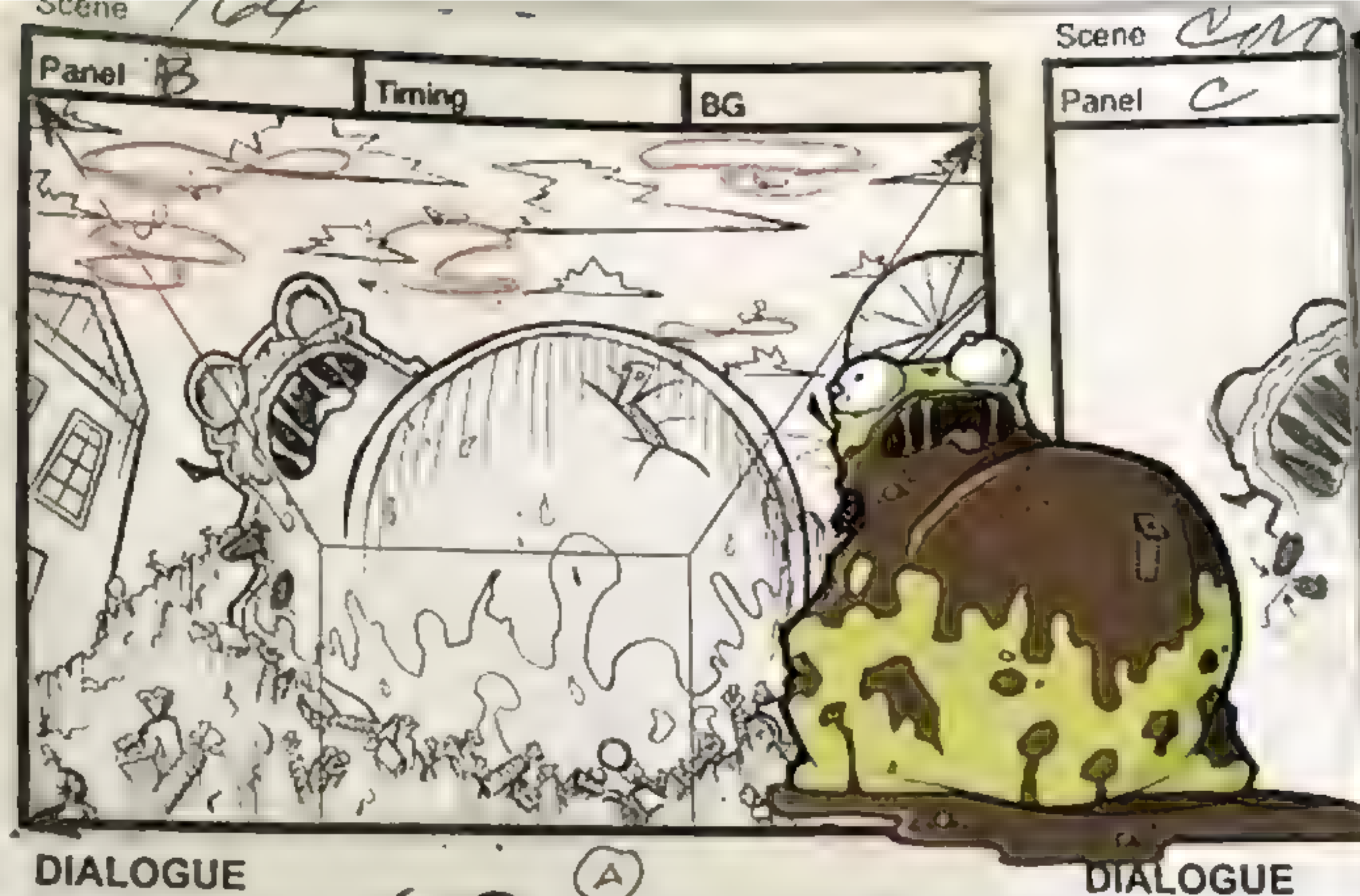
To make these nightmarish visuals and really sell the episode, the musical score had to be crafted with a specific purpose. Kevin Manthei was the composer for the episode.

**Kevin:** Jhonen Spectacular of Spooky Doom 16B was a great multiple double-double meaning that it used both A

and B sections of the episode's twenty-two minute running time as opposed to being two distinct eleven minute stories. Above, the cover page of

the second section of storyboards labeled 16B, and a choice panel of candy-bloated Gir, and the associated color model. The episode was written

by Jhonen and Rob Hummel, storyboarded by Bryan Kohanski, and revised by Colin Heck, Warren Lee, and Tim Eldred.



**Jhonen:** The music in that eyeball scene doesn't even soften it. It's... horrifying! I remember sometimes Chris and the other board artists would come in and sit through some of the early music that Kevin would come in with, and I think a lot of the board artists would be thinking beforehand, "Okay, maybe I went too far," or "Maybe I didn't, I'm not really sure," but then when they came in to view the animatic with the music for the first time, there would be genuine moments of shock, like, "Ohh, ohh my God, this is maybe too much!"

**Chris Graham:** That was one of them! It was already intense—it was blood-red skies, cybernetic eyes—and then on top of it was this John Carpenter-esque music, and I loved it.

**Jhonen:** The way that that's lit, the way that that's scored, the way that that's boarded—it's how you

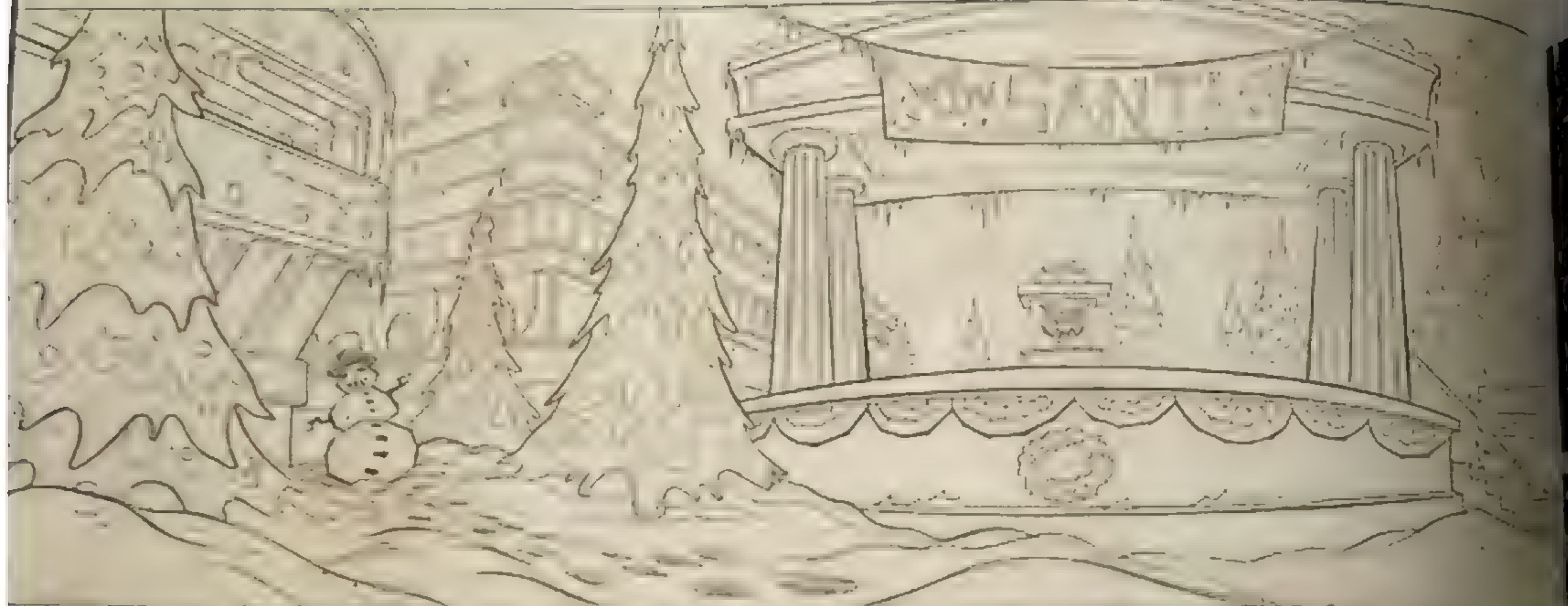
would execute a scene of a very sincere horror movie! It was nightmare stuff. That's why it's so funny Kevin was a huge part of that. Kevin's directive was, "Don't do cartoon music." And it was the way the board guys were boarding when it was horror or it was some kind of cool science fiction thing—they would do it the way the stuff was supposed to be handled, not for kids.

## Sound Design

Sound is essential in creating an effective motion picture. In cartoons, there is a slate of cliché sound effects libraries that have been in circulation for decades that can be put together into a rote track, or on the nose parody, but a completely custom design for the soundscape is the ideal.

In any typical Zim scene, a careful listening to the background noises is in order, especially out among the





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citizens of Earth. At MacMeaty's, the ambient chatter includes slopping hogs and thick, viscous boiling. Screaming. Industrial machines. A constant *blop squish smack* sound to create the sense of slithering gristle and oily flesh squelching down the throats of the germ-encrusted populace.

**Jhonen:** There would be a lot of car accidents, too. In a city street scene, in the background, you would just hear cars screeching and then you would hear screams.

In "Walk of Doom" (EP3B), Zim wears his new "insidiously clever" disguise, an old man costume. He and Gir are lost in the city. Their average, uneventful walk around the city is scored with a suspenseful thriller film-style track, and the background sound design has revolving screams, gunfire, and explosions mixed in to

create the sense of constant surrounding carnage. The visuals are as benign as a small Chihuahua, a street performer, a cashier at a cash register, and a few people window shopping.

With growing fear and paranoia, Zim and Gir board a city bus. The bus's soundscape—coughing, gagging, pig noises, swarms of flies, gas releasing from balloons, and droning tones—build an agoraphobic, germophobic, claustrophobic nightmare.

**Jhonen:** Our sound guys were Salami Studios. They were told that when machines were moving, when things are transforming, when ships were looming, you're sound-designing a movie—these are real things, this isn't *The Jetsons*. This is serious, heavy sounds and lasers and energy. And these things are *dangerous*. They got into it, too. I loved it. I'd go in to preview their mix before

adjusting anything, and they would get creative, their own and be like, "I don't know what you're going to think of this, but check this out!" And they would have a sound effect that was just, so horrifying. Or so funny. I loved that they were having fun and not just following orders.

One of the most upsetting things that I laugh at every time now, because I had forgotten how horrifying it is, is in the Christmas episode ("The Most Horrible X-Mas Ever" (EP27)). Zim hooks up the guy dressed as Santa Claus to a machine to extract his Christmas imagery so he could learn what Christmas is, because Zim doesn't know. And it's this buildup, of *chugchugchug* woos and there's more and more, and there's drill sounds . . . and there's a shot of Zim looking at the calendar—a close-up on Zim—and you hear the guy in the background hooked up to this machine





and the sounds are these dentist drills and chain saws and he's like "OOOOGH UUUGHGH"—he's wailing! The scene ends, and Zim is laughing because he's got a plan and the music is scary and building to this crescendo and you hear the guy in the background screaming, like this thing is killing him. It is not silly sounding. It is horrible. People hearing that would be like, "My God, this is terrible." But I'm like, "My God, this is terrible! But that's why it's funny!" I had forgotten it was that harsh.

**Chris Graham:** I don't think we were ever like, "Let's shock people." We were just doing things because we were into it. "I like David Cronenberg, so I want to do something like that." "Cool!" It was what we liked.

## Social Angst

Zim explored more than one way to be a remarkably dark cartoon. Avoiding all of the sunny tropes of a kids-in-school cartoon that usually starts an ensemble of plucky classmates learning social lessons and being friends while solving mysteries, Zim's primary players were tormented, socially isolated loners.

In "A Room with a Moose" (EP9A), Zim seethes while reviewing footage of his constant harassment at the hands of the other children in Skool. The Earth children are mocking and laughing at him, but only one is singled out in Zim's frame: Dib. A harrowing sequence builds as Zim stares with furious intensity at Dib, the focus of his ire.

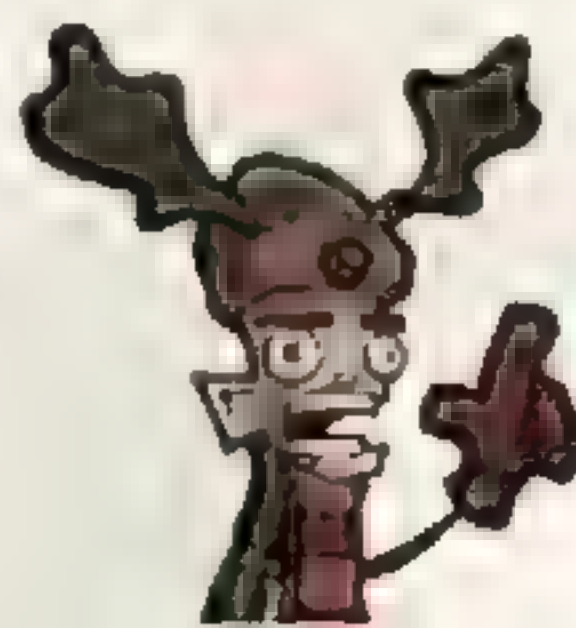
An undercurrent of Zim that neither Zim nor Dib ever acknowledge is that they reside, inexorably, some where at the bottom of the social hierarchy in Skool,

even despite the colorful cast of children around them, with their own eccentricities and basic functionality issues. Zim and Dib each has his own single-minded obsession, and the nightmare of Skool, the other children, and teachers is just the backdrop that they stoically manage to exist in. It's their geeky hobbies (conquering the world, saving the world/paranormal research) that both set them apart and sustain their resistance to social pain. It is also one of the most relatable aspects of the series to kids with their own obsessions and social torment to manage. Zim and Dib's plight is very real.

## Biology Lessons

Compounding social problems, changes to the body throughout childhood and adolescence can be sources of even greater, and relatable stress. Human blemishes are magnified to comic extremes often in Zim as body

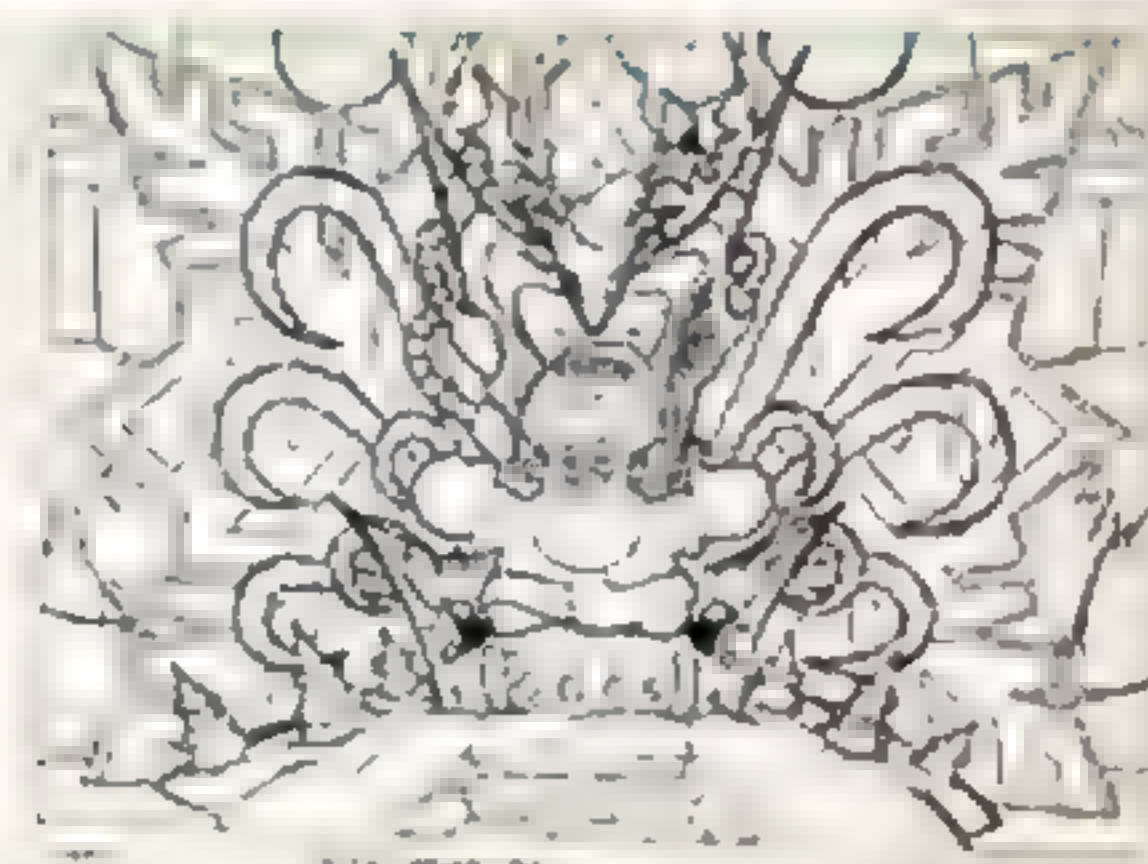
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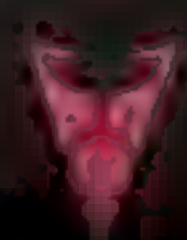
Above: A layout drawing by Spencer G. Dunn, background pan, and a series of stills from "The Most Horrible X-Mas Ever" (EP27), in which the

sound design is worth paying attention to closely in order to fully grasp the implied horror going on in the background of the scene



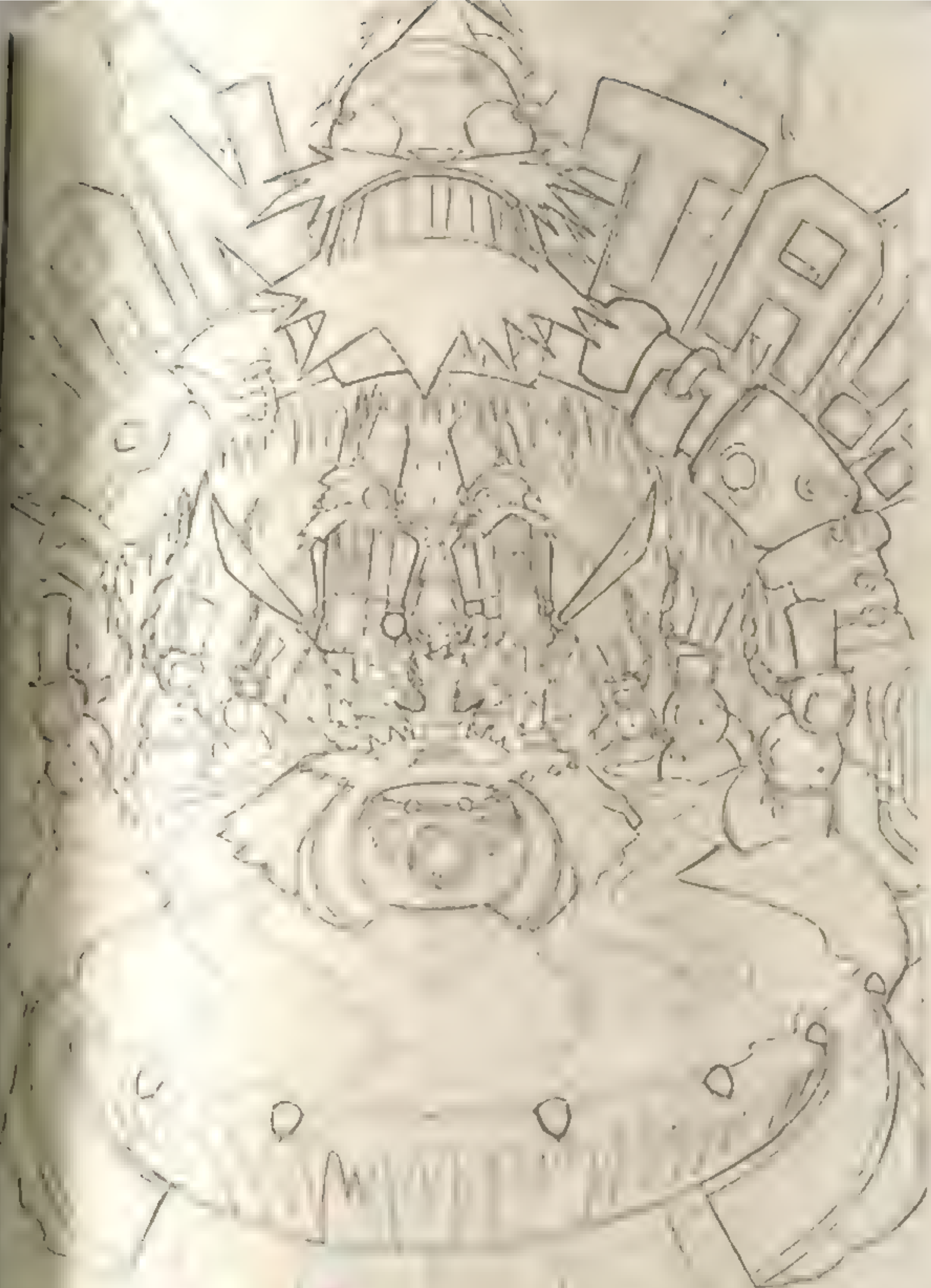


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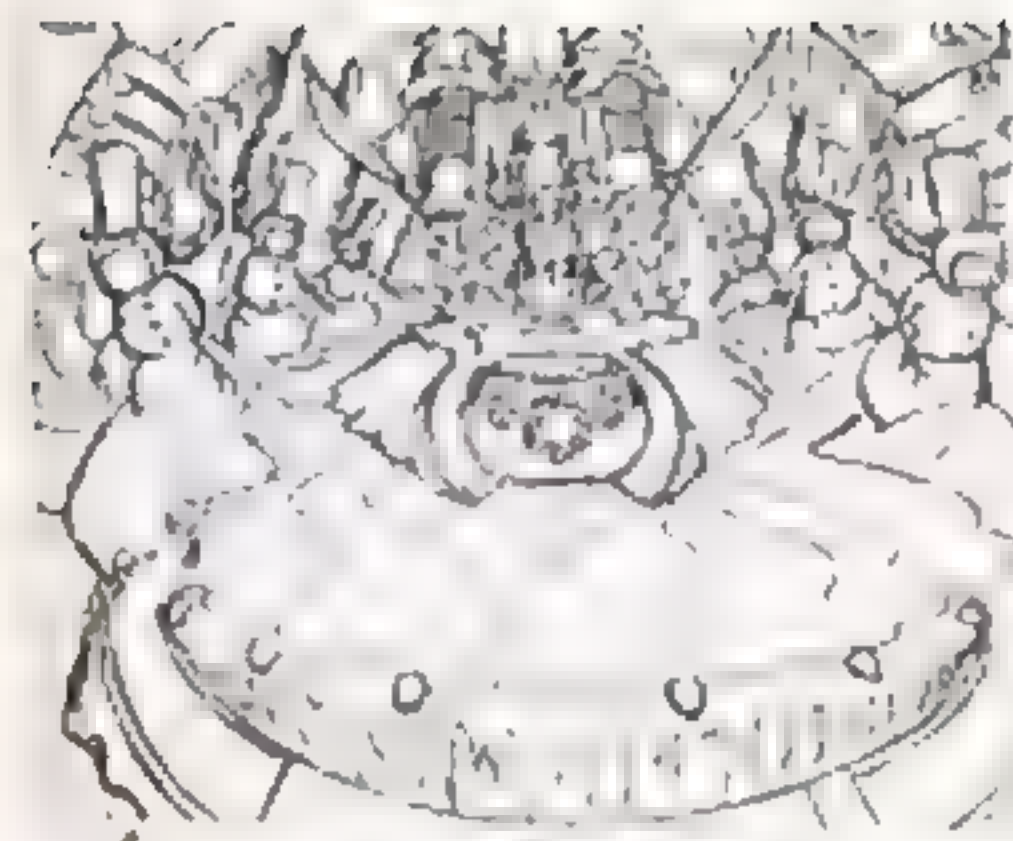


THE MOST HORRIBLE X-MAS EVER





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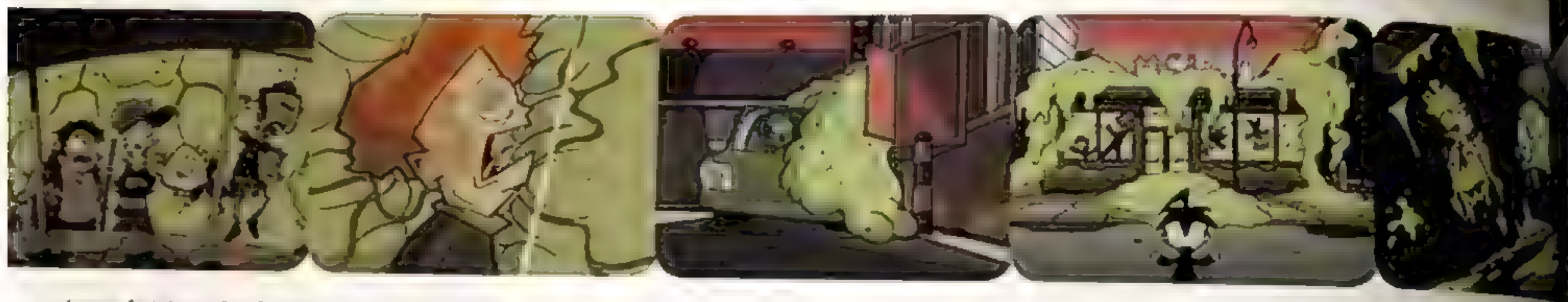
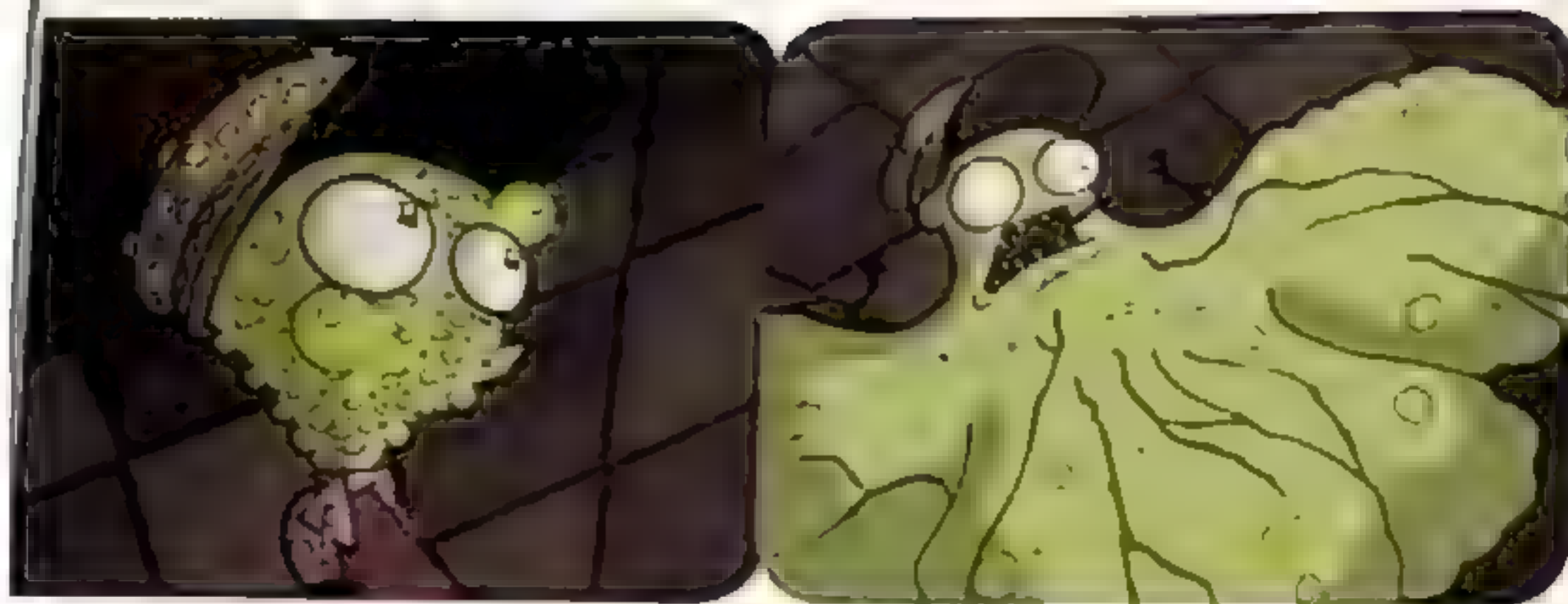


This spread: Opposite page, far left, a promotional drawing from the episode "The Most Horrible X-Mas Ever" (EP27) illustrates Zim, Gir,

and Mini Mees in jolly costumes with a delight! Oh. Additional art from the episode here includes finished backgrounds, layout drawings, and notes

for design specifics of Zim's authoritarian-style Christmas takeover spectacle.





In "Career Day" (EP6A) Zim is assigned work as a fry cook at MacMeaties. Unforeseen by Zim, the Galactic Equinox Alien Molt Phenomenon which causes all aliens living off their home planets to go through a hideous molt for a few seconds, begins its initial stages for Zim at work. Bumps begin to form on Zim's skin. One of his french fries pops green gloop onto the french fries.

Preceding the climactic scene from Katsuhiro Otomo's film *Akira* (1998), Zim's hideous molt is an eruption of pulsing, veined flesh that fills MacMeaties like a viscous liquid, compressing patrons against the cracking glass and flowing out of drive-through windows and exhaust pipes. Even as Zim's inflated form retreats instantaneously and he stands fresh as a newly molted cicada, the biological process leaves a substantial quantity of green ooze.

Zim, however, is only worried about his cover being blown.

In a second episode involving eruptions of the dermis, "Rise of the Zitboy" (EP7B), Zim develops a gigantic semitransparent boil on the side of his head with swirling liquid visible inside, which turns out to be hypnotic. Zim is horrified by the deformity until he realizes that he can use it to control the masses.

**Jhonen:** We wrote whatever heightened Zim's sense of Hitchcockian paranoia . . . anything that played with tension to a laughable extent. The show was supposed to be so serious that that is why it was funny. All of the characters have no clue that they're being silly—this is life or death stuff to them. It really is serious, too—Zim really is an alien invader, Dib really is trying to save the Earth—but in terms of the setting being an element, like the school, and no one else caring, the more tension we could throw in, the funnier. So

if it was Zim having a pimple, nobody cares—just thought it was gross or whatever—but to Z when he first finds out about this giant zit on his head, it's terrifying. I don't remember if it turned out that it had hypnotic powers. *[laughs]*

## Episodic Action

One way that the *Zim* series stands out is that it was created in a past era when most American animated cartoon series episodes were self-contained so even out multi-episode or season-wide continuity. For example, there was no fallout in a subsequent episode from Zim's giant hypnotic zit eruption that destroyed the classroom with a geyser of pus. Behind the door, credits the whole world would reset, ready for a new adventure.

Above: In the episode "Career Day" (EP6A) Zim suffers the grotesque Galactic Equinox Alien Molt Phenomenon at an inopportune moment

while working at a fast food restaurant for Skool's career day









5001 BOLOGNA DIB STAGE 1 WHITE



50174 BOLOGNA DIB STAGE 2



5001 BOLOGNA DIB FINAL STAGE



5005 DIB'S SKELETON



5015 DIB TURNING INTO BLOTT



5018 DIB IN THE CLOSET



5013 DIB IN BOLOGNA RASH



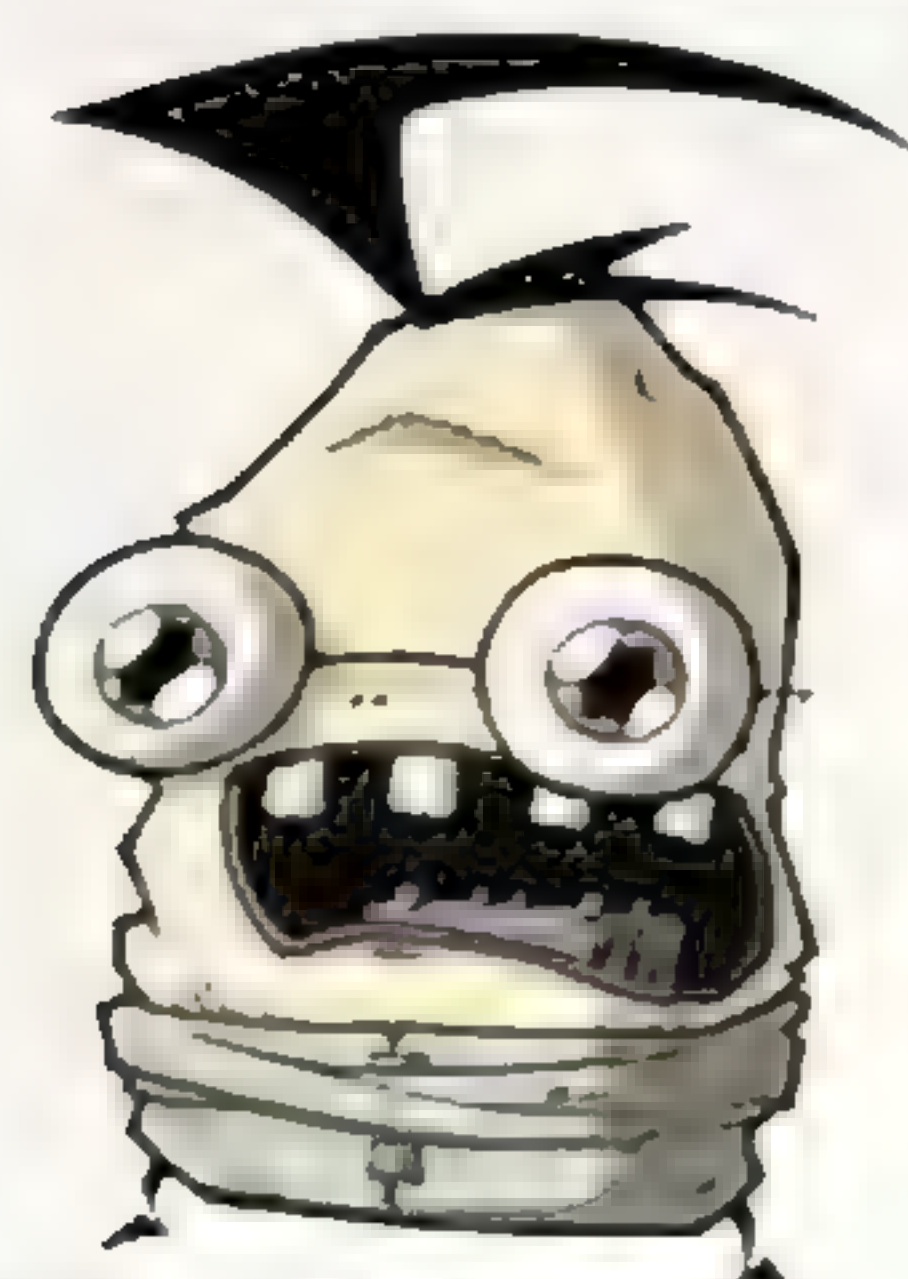
50172 BOLOGNA ZIM STAGE #1



50173 BOLOGNA ZIM STAGE #2



5009 BOLOGNA ZIM FINAL STAGE



50110 BOLOGNA ZIM FINAL STAGE



50111 DIB IN THE CLOSET



SQUISHED



NOT SO SQUISHED



50111 DIB IN THE CLOSET

# BODY HORROR

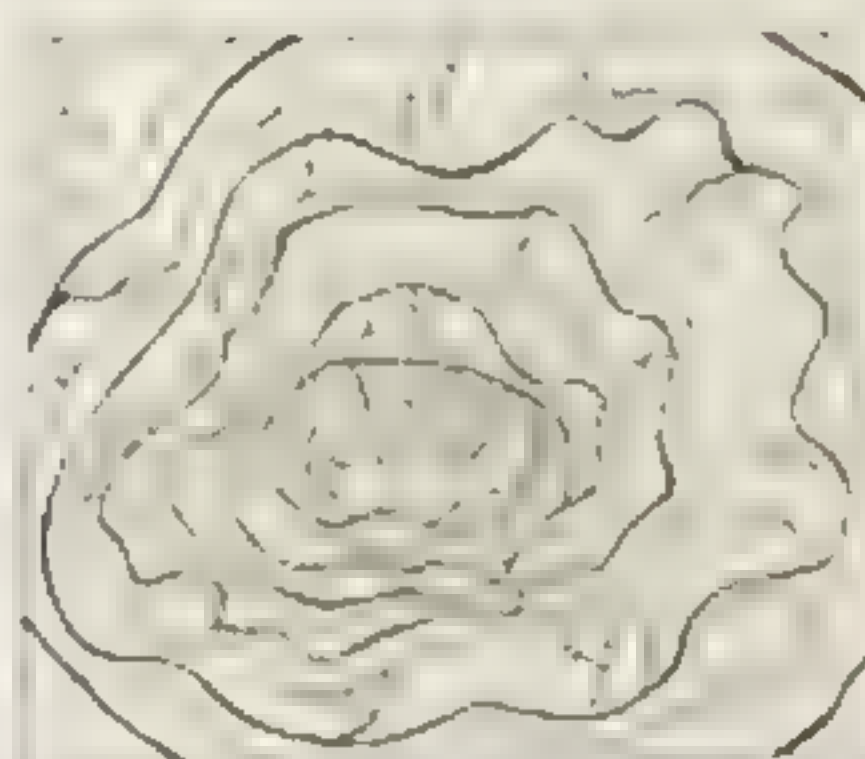
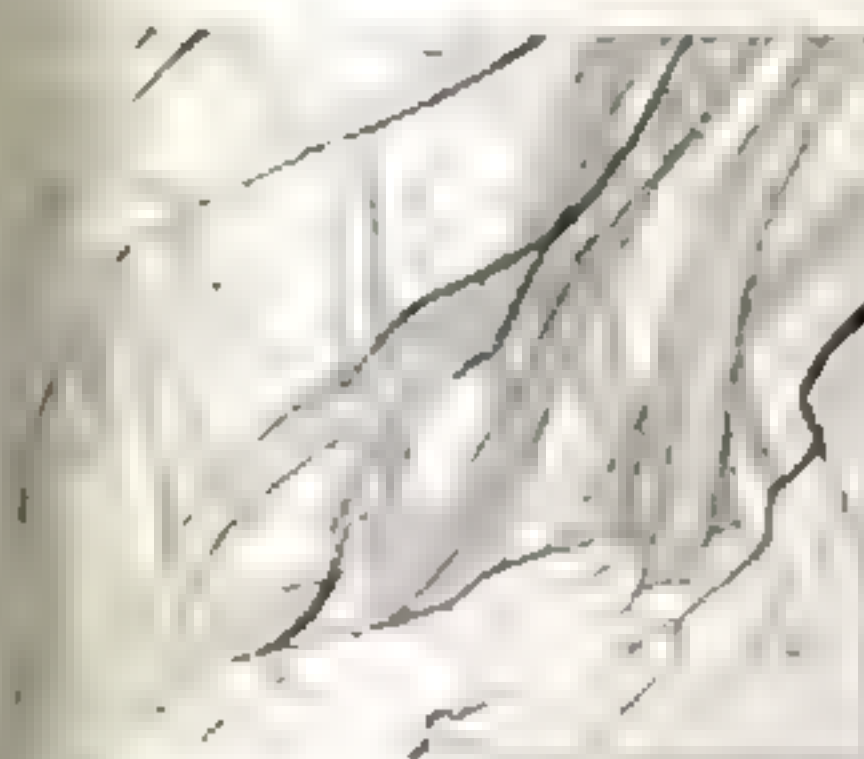
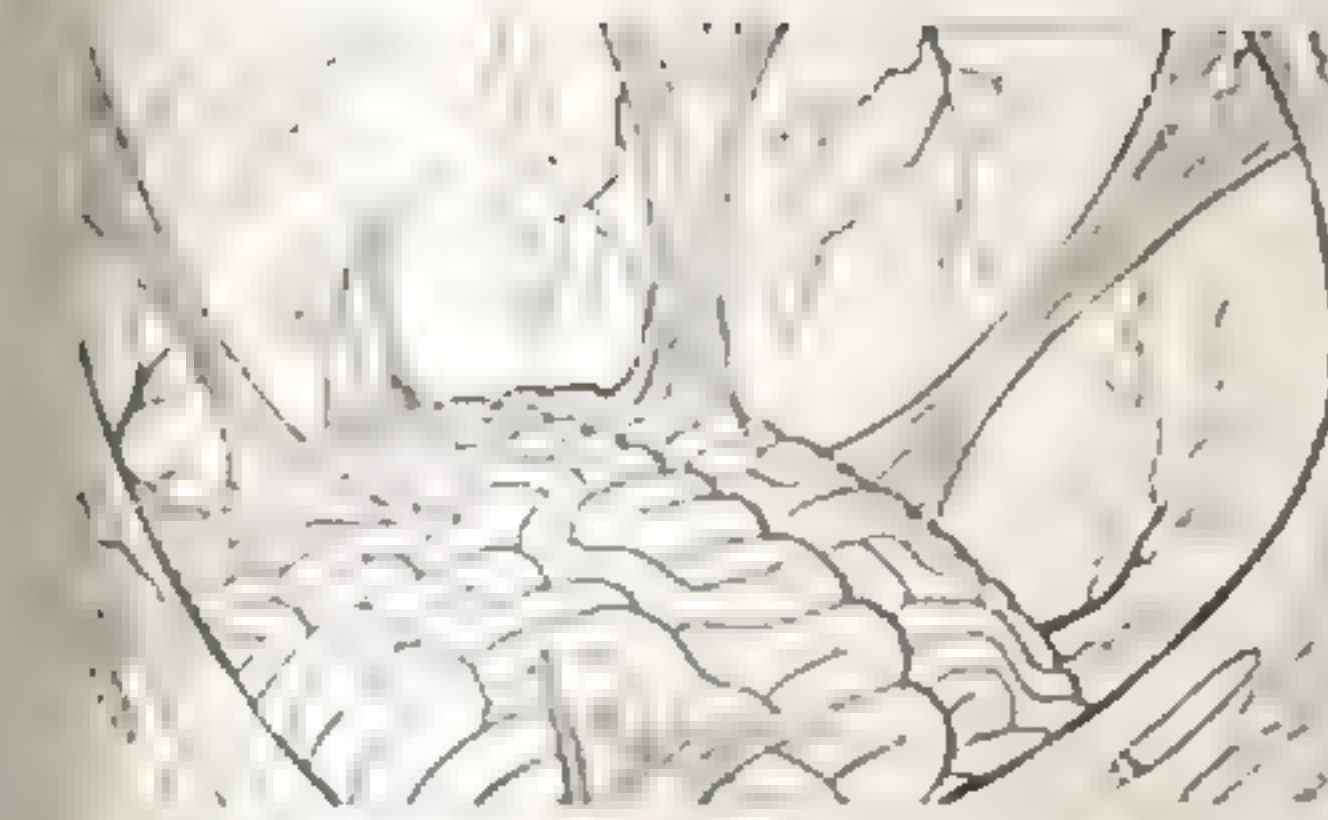
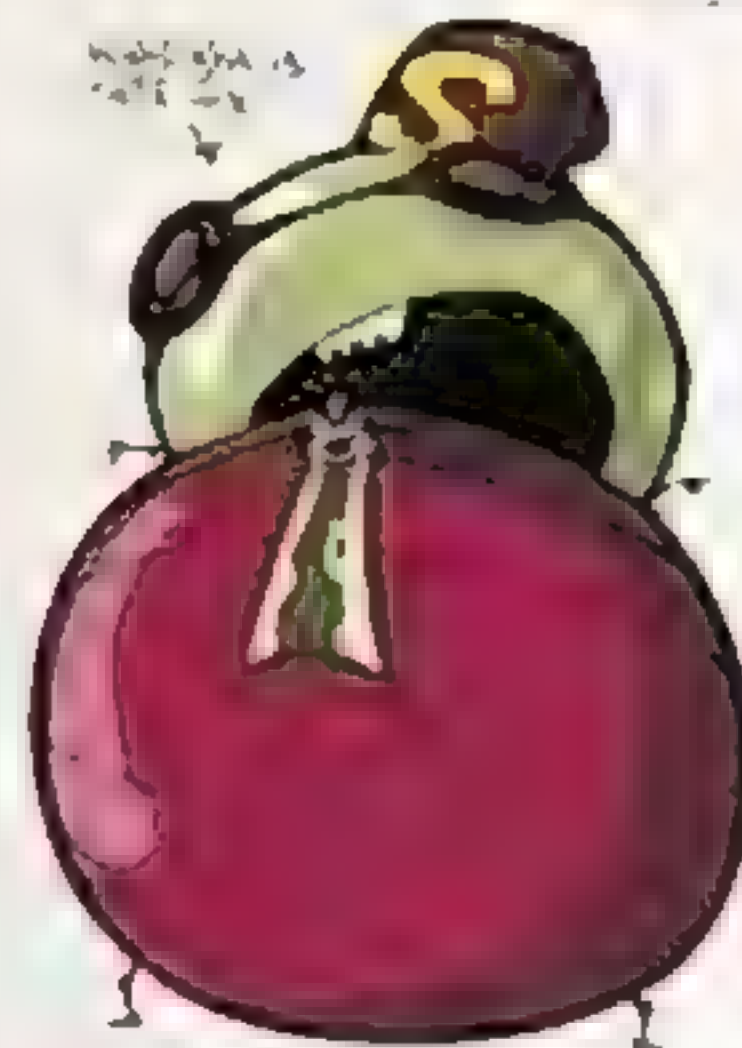
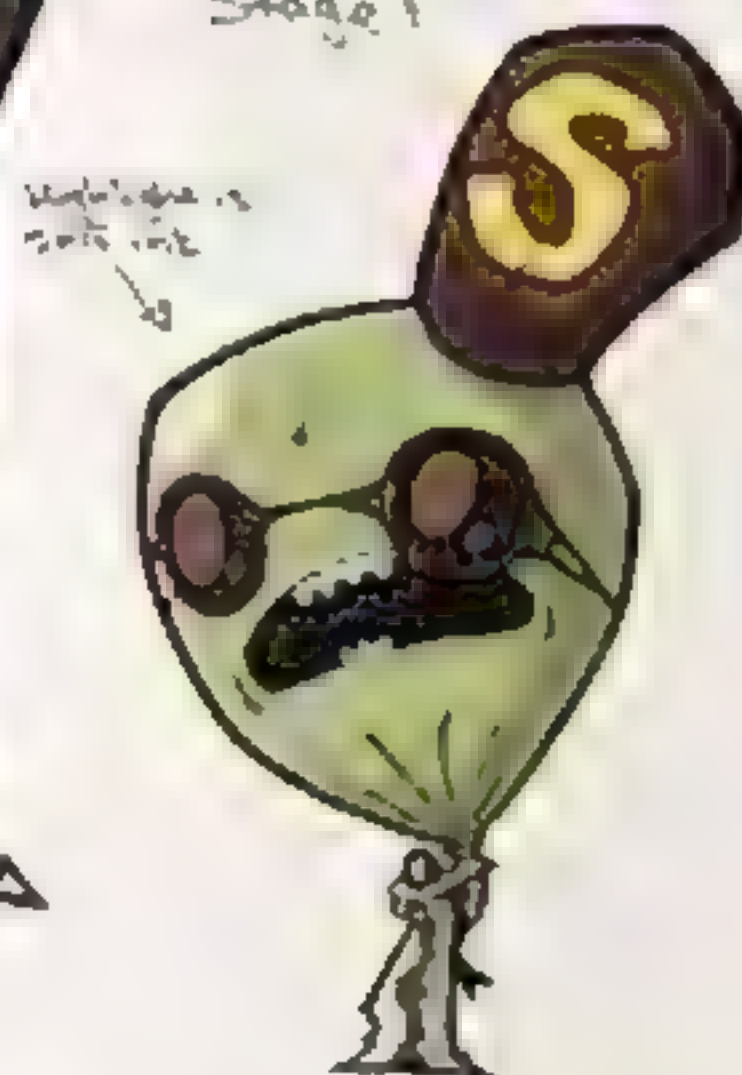
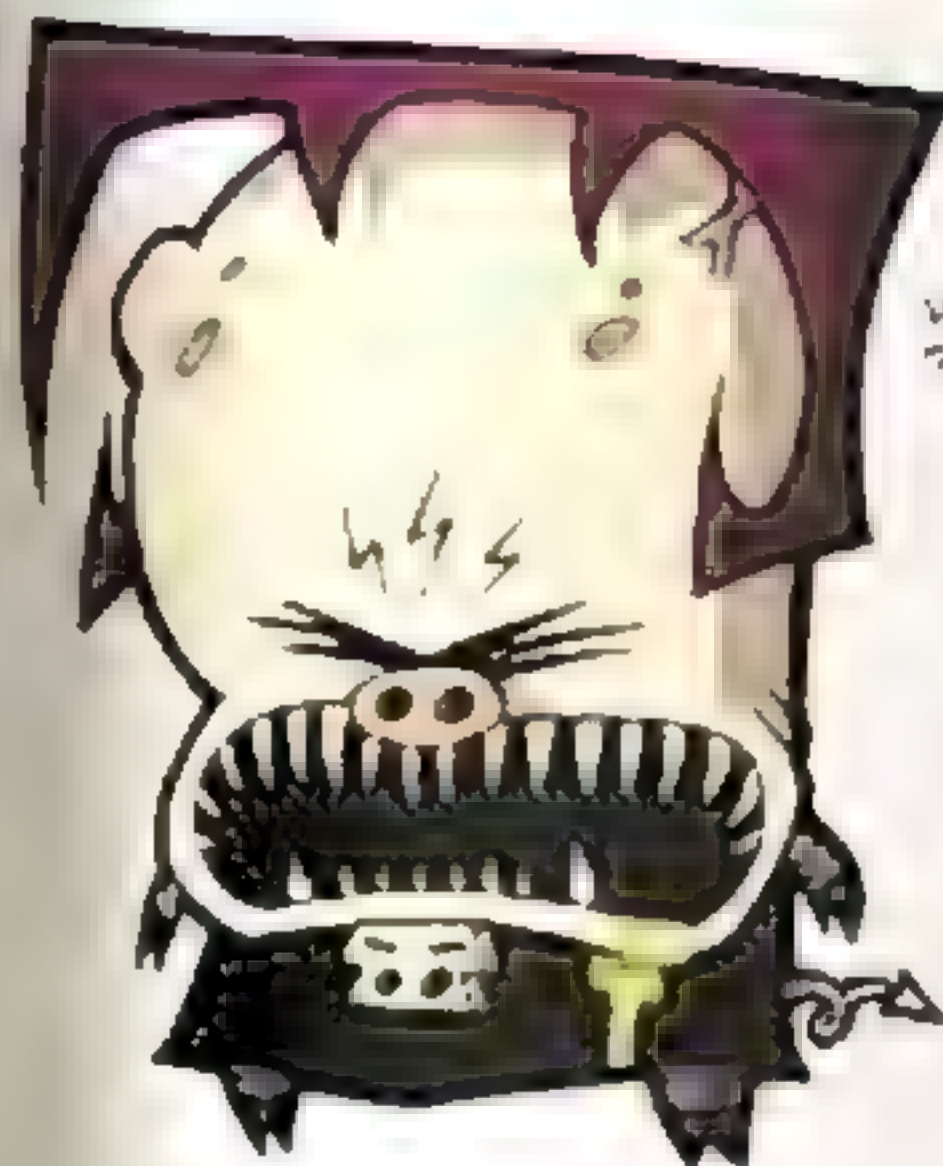
This spread: Cartoon animation is the perfect medium for depicting grotesque mutations of form. The Zim crew frequently submitted their cute and lovable characters to horrible

transformations that evoked both laughter or revulsion. These special poses made Dib's bologna transformation stages from "Baby Bologna" (EP12A), and Dib being sucked



ZIM IN SHLOOGORGH'S UNIFORM  
READY TO EXPLODE

Stage 1



the cartoon's own forehead from "Halloween Spooky Doom" (EP14), among other drawings above depict the inside of Dib's body from "NanoZim"

(EP28). Above right, Zim pokes out a spool of children's internal organs before shoving them back inside from the episode "Dark Harvest" (EP48). Below that, in a couple of stills from

the episode "Bloody's Pizza Hog" (EP108) Gaz fantasizes about whether or not letting Zim vivisect her brother Dib to see what he "would look like with his organs on the outside" would

prevent them from a family night eating out at a restaurant. (It would.)





**Jhonen:** We never got really structured with what the Earth even was. If that was even America where Zim landed — sometimes it was more representative of actual places, but we never said that they lived in America. The maps were always a little weird. We had a globe in the school, and we made sure to have the continents not be recognizable.

I wish we had gotten further along with that sort of stuff. There wasn't the American president—it was President Man from President Land. In the comics Earth is spelled "Udn"—it's some other place.

The hyper-exaggerated absurdity of Zim's Earth could be interpreted as a satirical look at the uglier side of our reality. After all, Jhonen had conceived the series by thinking about "how stupid everything is."

## The Chaos Factor

*But it's random!* In the early 2000s, so-called "random" humor had become the lingua franca among the young and Internet savvy. This was the post-dating-hub-ign, pre-smartphone, pre-meme, pre-YouTube era, when much of the Internet's user discourse took place on fragmented discussion boards organized around specific subjects. Zim's debut placed it at the heart of this era, and its absurdist elements and particularly the strange dialog of Gir, the malfunctioning robot, are often cited as part of the mass culture media that helped to feed this trend.

**Jhonen:** Zim got this reputation of sort of being a progenitor of random humor, but whenever people say that, I don't think their arguments are well thought out. There was a reason why every stupid joke was in there. Even if the point was that there

was no point. But to have anything be random on a television series? There's so much that goes behind this stuff, there's so much time that goes into it, that trust me, it's there for a reason. And usually, it's that someone thought it was funny. Or they were like, "I don't know if this is funny, but let's see if this works." In a situation where the choice was to have something that doesn't make sense in a scene or not to have anything there at all, I was always like, "At least let's make the memorable." And often times what is memorable is something that has no logic behind it. That's why anything worked on the show! Because we were Not knowing! Failing a lot of times.

Twenty-five percent of the time it was probably us just addressing network notes and just doing it very snarkily, and then those fixes would be approved, and we were like, "Oh, we never..."





...and they get in." So we'd just leave  
 ... Let's see what happens." Things  
 ... out of the elevator after a crash in  
 ... (EP128) has happened because  
 ... in the original version, we'd  
 ... in an elevator and crash, and  
 ... And the notes were that we  
 ... off—that wouldn't be nice—so  
 ... By saying, "Okay, he's not dead.  
 ... that now he can fly!" And  
 ... of events that resulted in that  
 ... We could have come up  
 ... more logical events, but we just  
 ... that would be the funnier way to go  
 ... flack for being a random char-  
 ... I imagine that people who say stuff  
 ... know this show. Gir is a broken

machine! None of it is random, it is the result of him  
 being malfunctional. He doesn't work! He's made of  
 garbage. It's amazing that he functions at all. Good  
 for him! He's getting by. Nothing that any of the  
 board artists came up with for Gir ever felt random.  
 He might be annoying, and he might not be funny,  
 depending on who you are, but it's not random if the  
 whole point of the character is that nothing he does  
 makes any sense.

Zim saying something that doesn't make any  
 sense is the result of him not understanding human  
 civilization or language or culture; he just doesn't get  
 it. He just doesn't understand the people

Dib doesn't say random stuff. He isn't a random  
 character—there is always a purpose. Gaz doesn't  
 say random stuff. Two of the main characters are  
 either people who are broken, or don't understand  
 why what they're saying makes no sense. There's

nothing random about that, so when we write them,  
 we write them in their characters, which happen to  
 come off as bizarre



This spread: In the episode "The Sad, Sad Tale  
 of Chickendoom" (EP188), the filthy nightmare  
 world that Dib inhabits gets fleshed out

more as we visit new locations such as the  
 Chicky Lucky restaurant chain, the hospital, and  
 the Sweaty Pits apartments. How much this all is

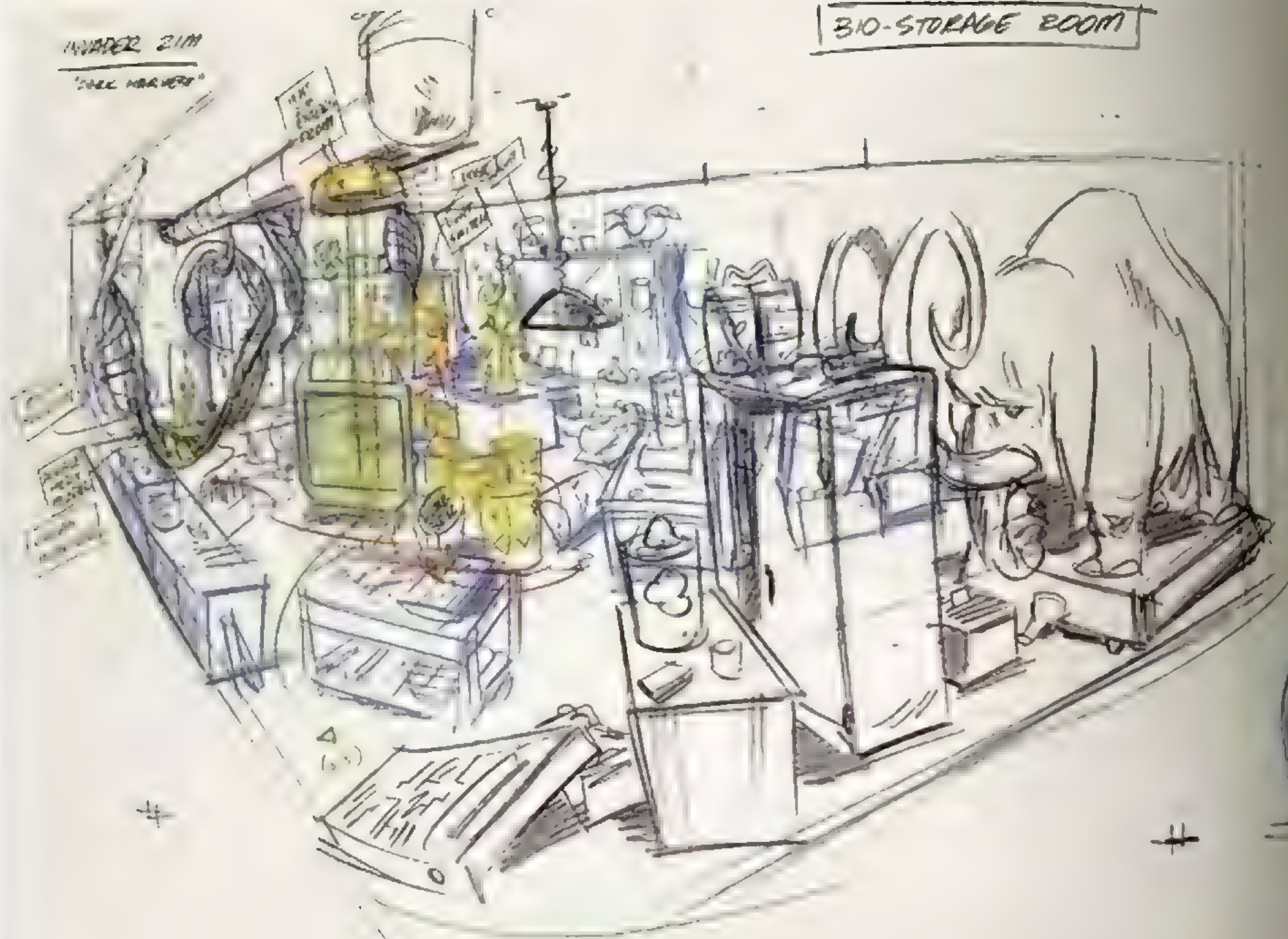
based on modern life in the United States is left  
 to the eye of the beholder



INVASION 2100

"THE HARBOR"

BIO-STORAGE ROOM

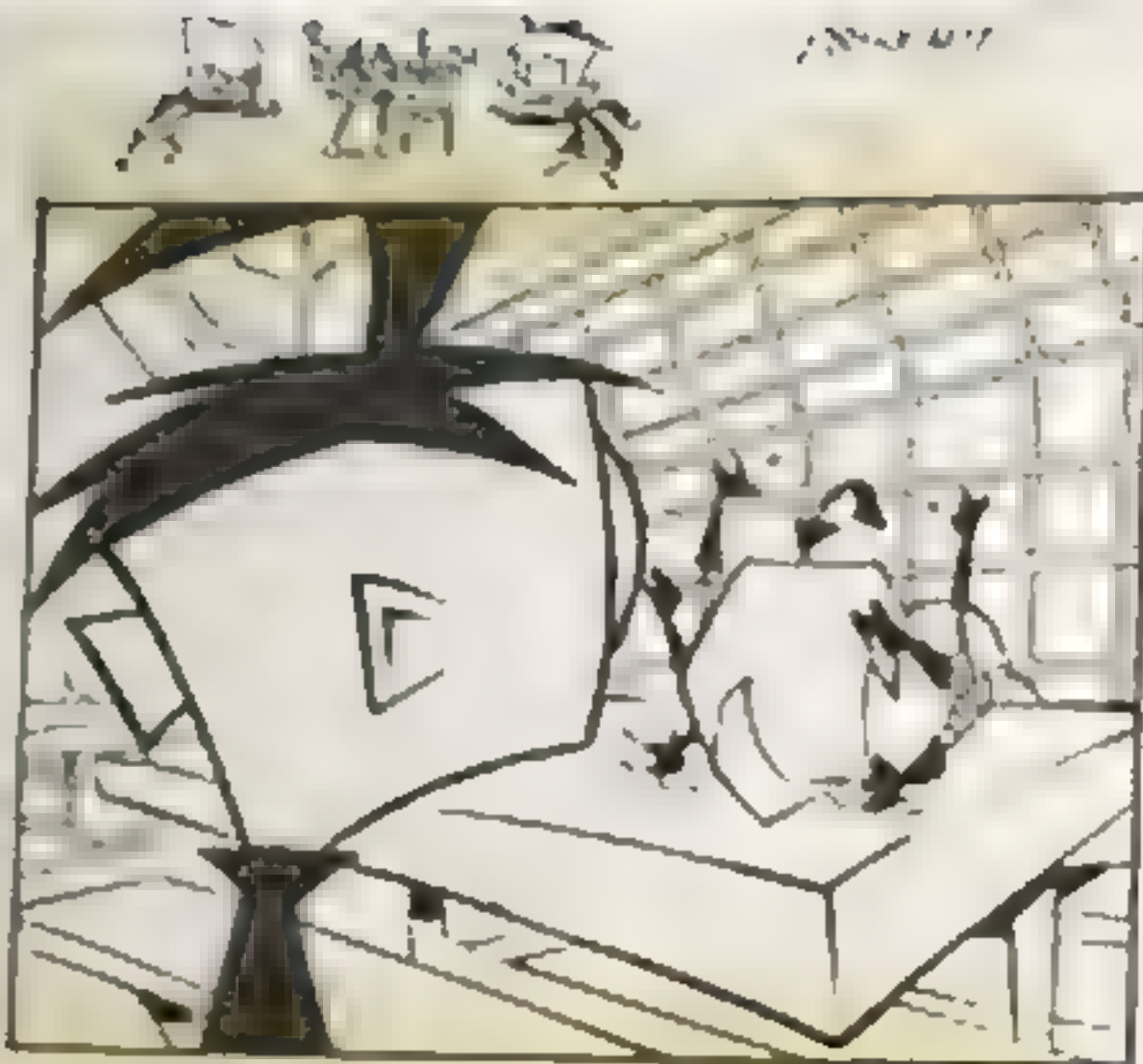


ACTION MAPS

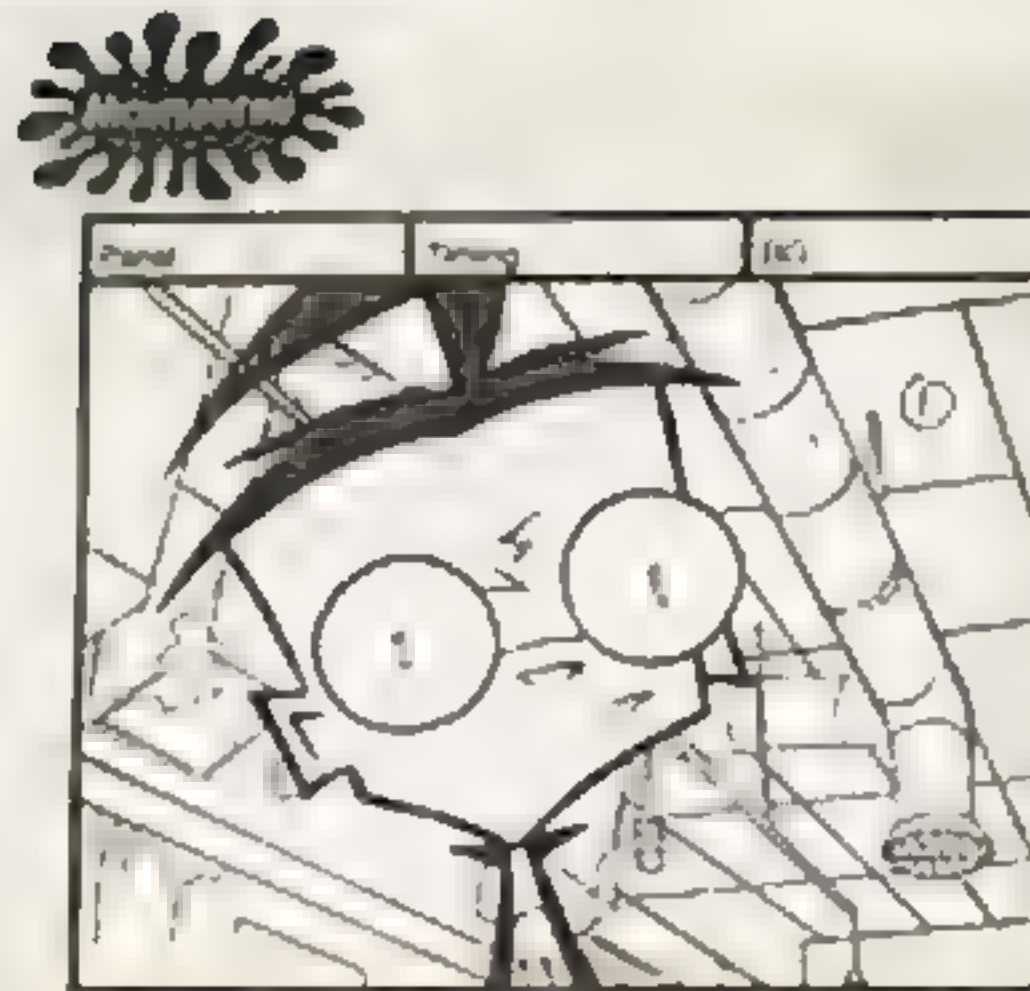






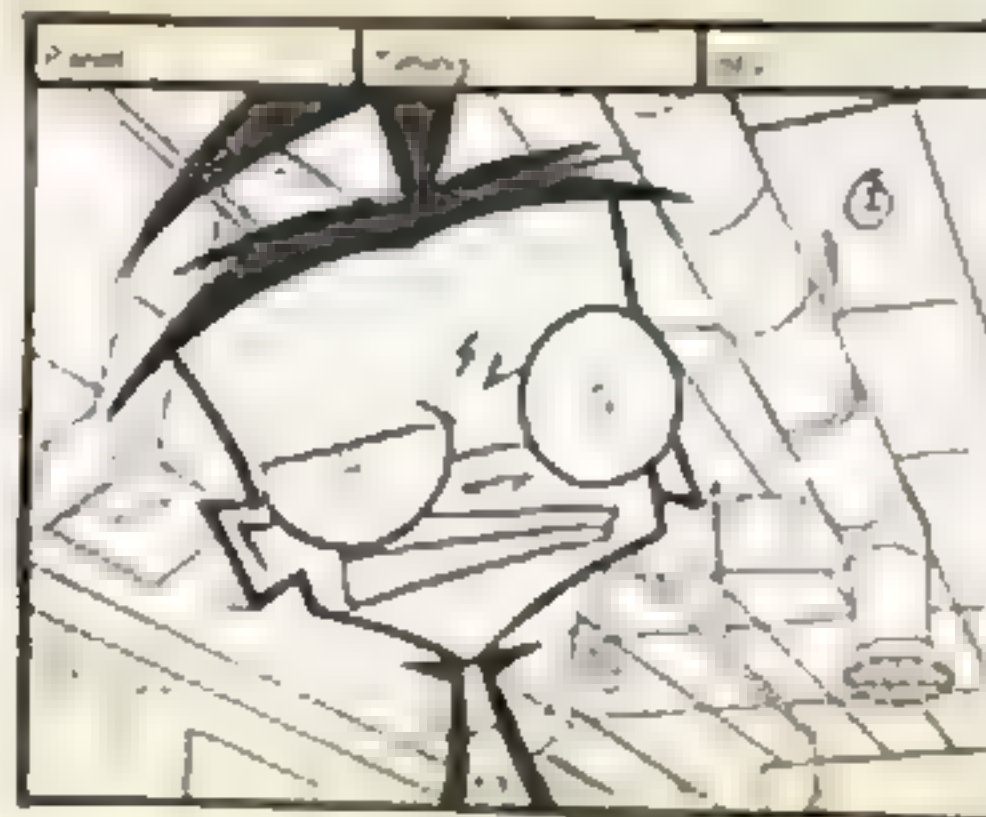


THE MURDERER IS DEAD - THE POLICE ARE HERE  
AND THE MURDERER IS DEAD  
THE POLICE ARE HERE AND THE MURDERER IS DEAD!



DIALOGUE (CUT)

THE MURDERER IS DEAD - THE POLICE ARE HERE  
AND THE MURDERER IS DEAD

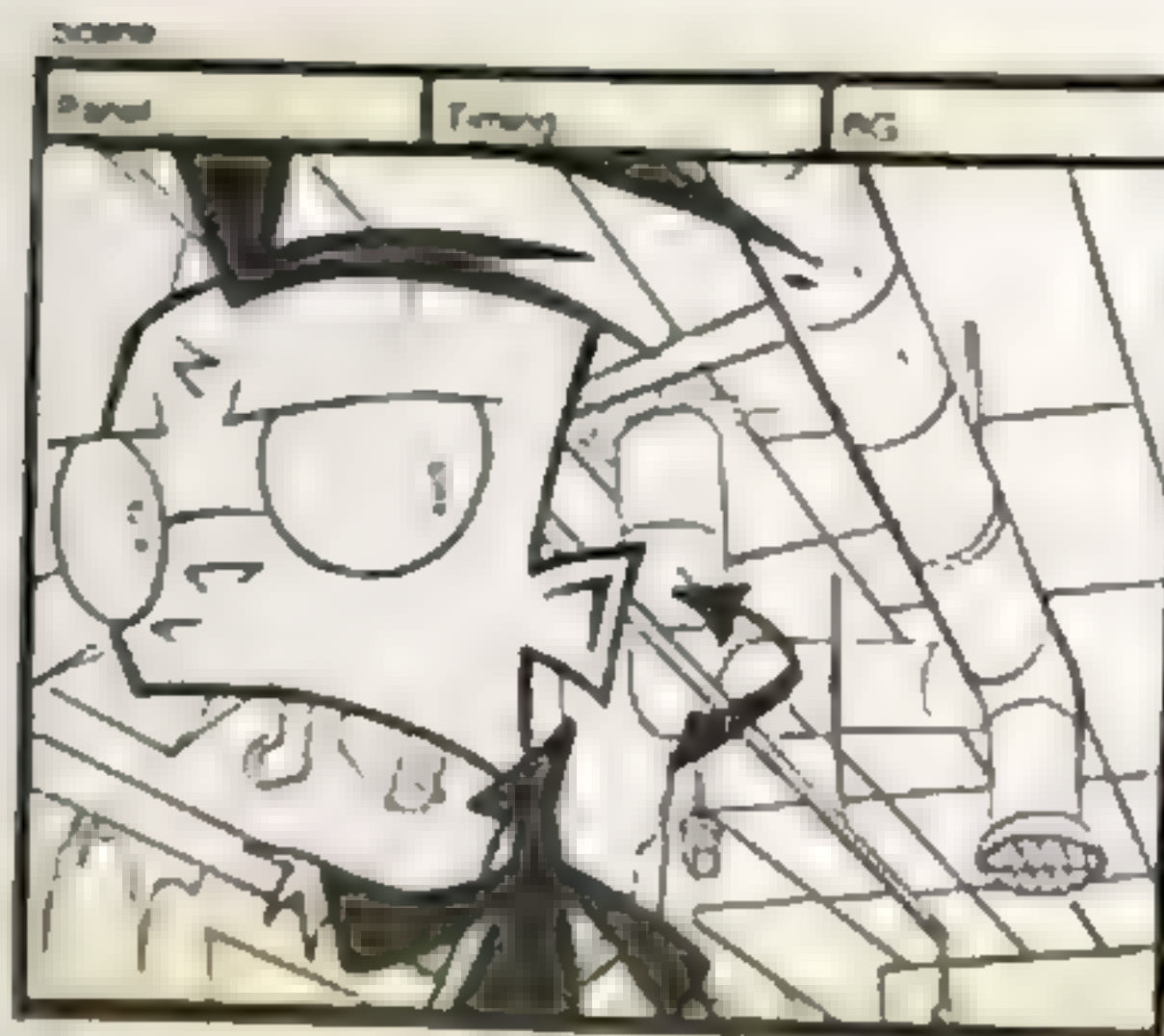


DIALOGUE (CUT)

THE MURDERER IS DEAD - THE POLICE ARE HERE  
AND THE MURDERER IS DEAD

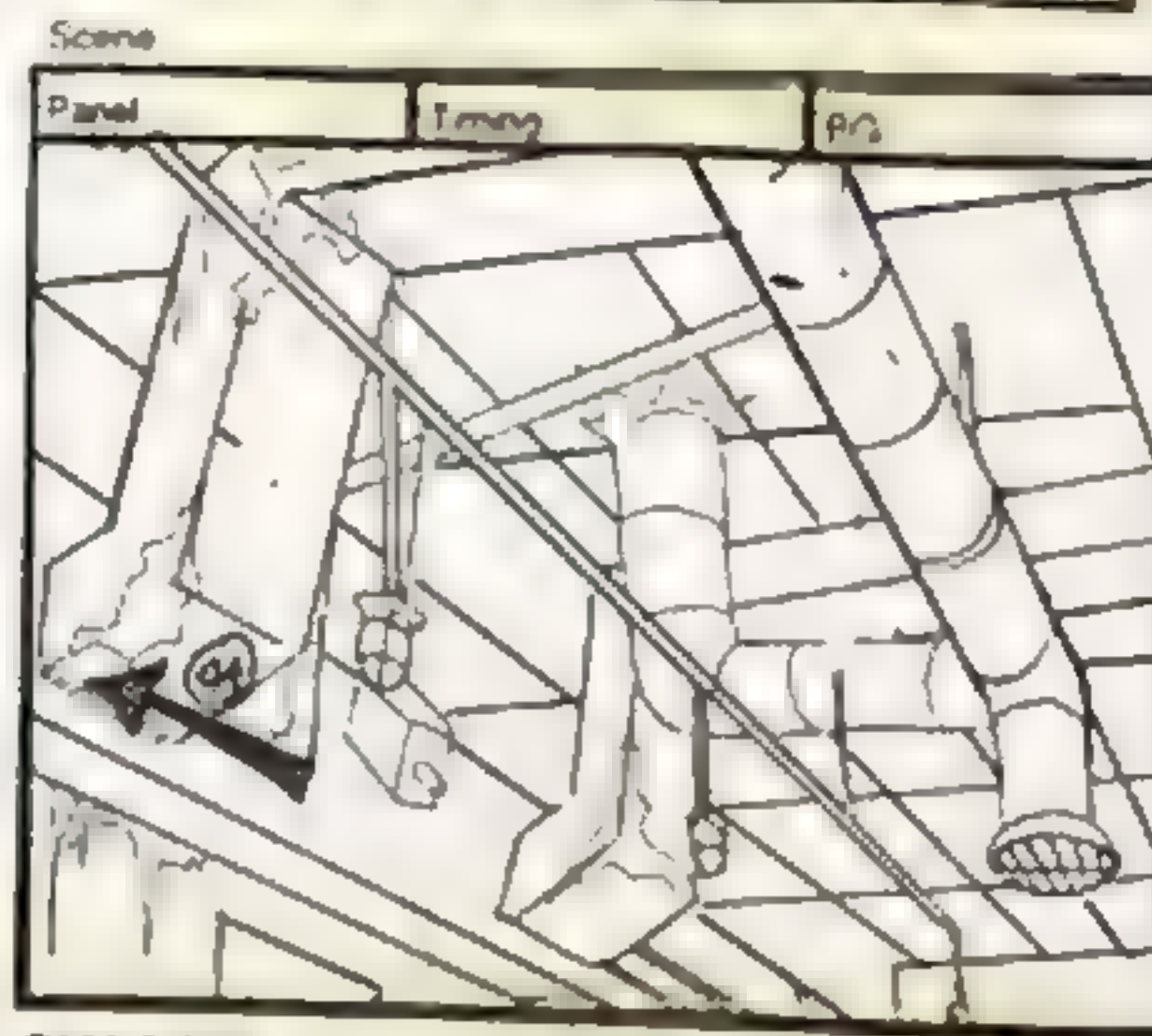


COSSO POORCHY  
DRINKER OF HATE  
COLOR PEN  
MURDERER



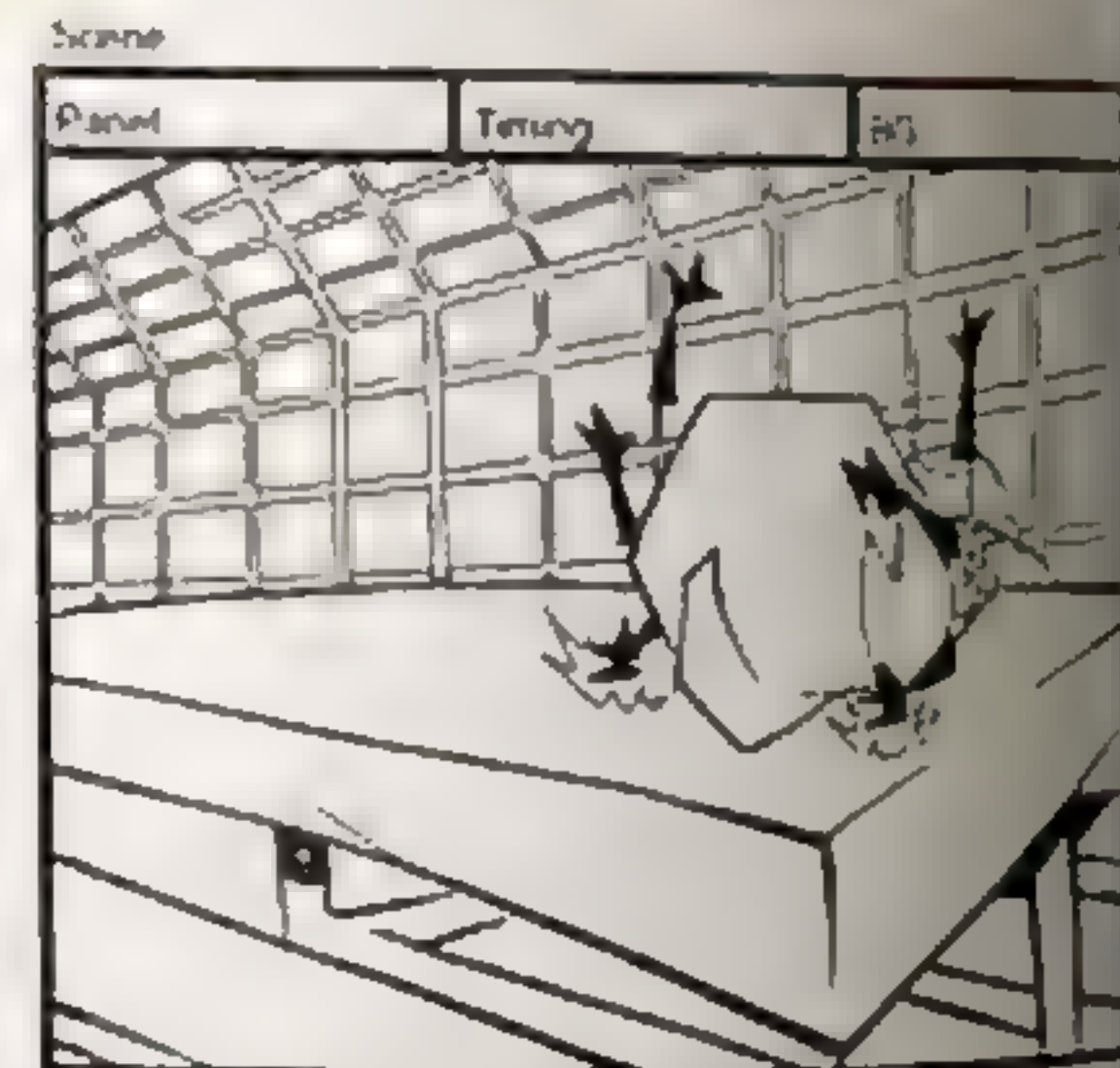
DIALOGUE

DB TURNS AND BEGINS TO WALK



DIALOGUE

... 2/5.



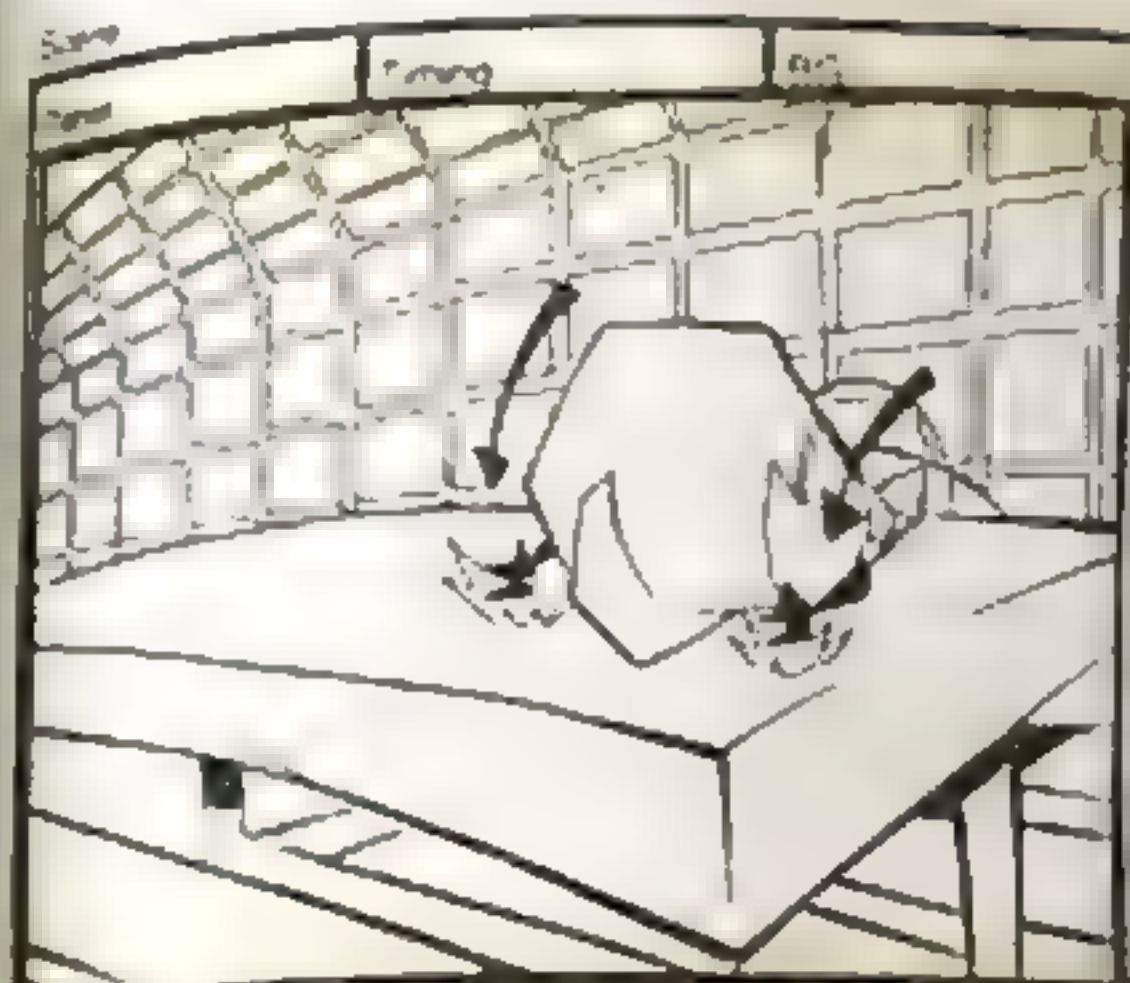
DIALOGUE

ZIM CONTINUES HITTING TABLE



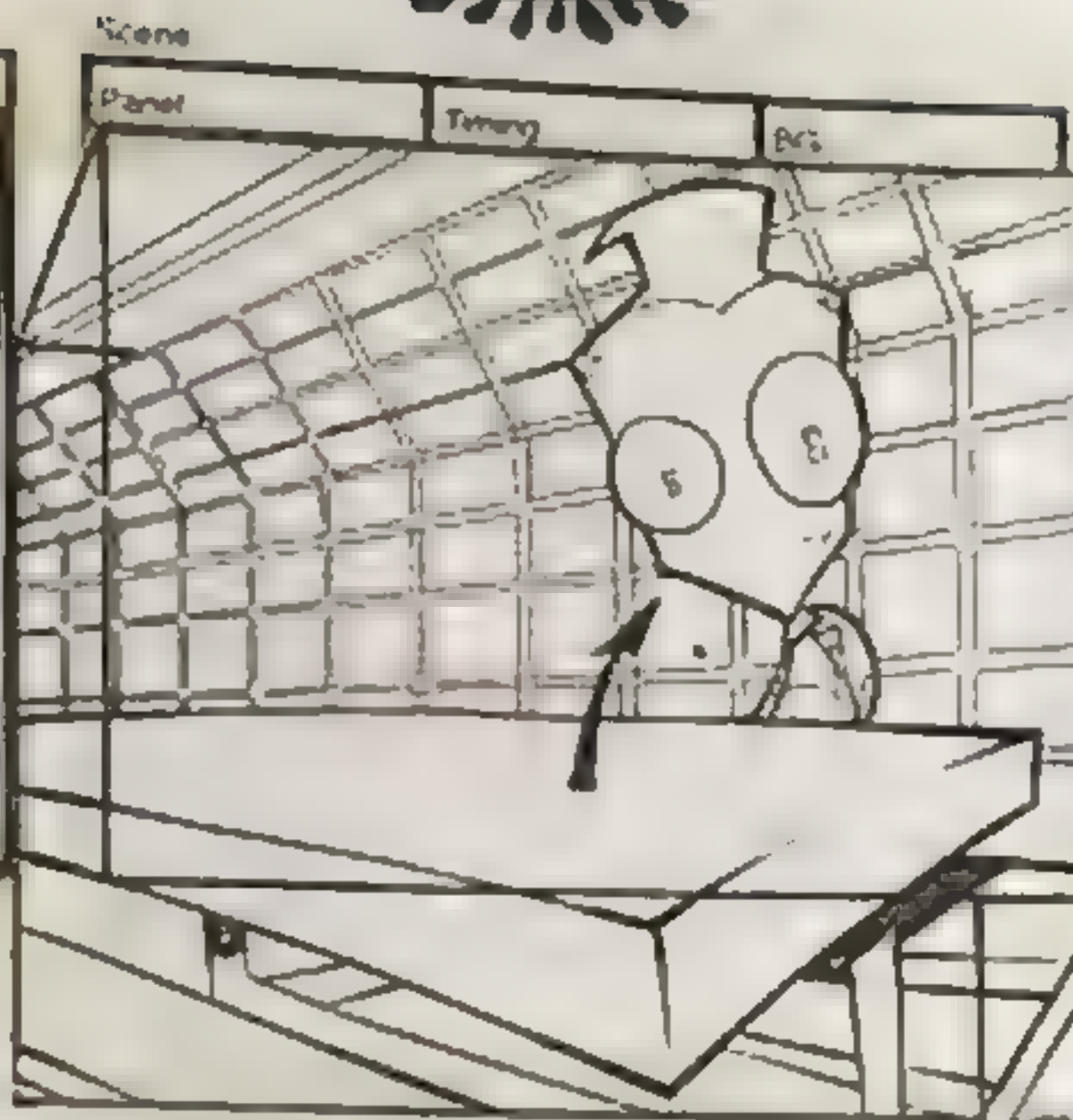
STORYBOARDS





DIALOGUE

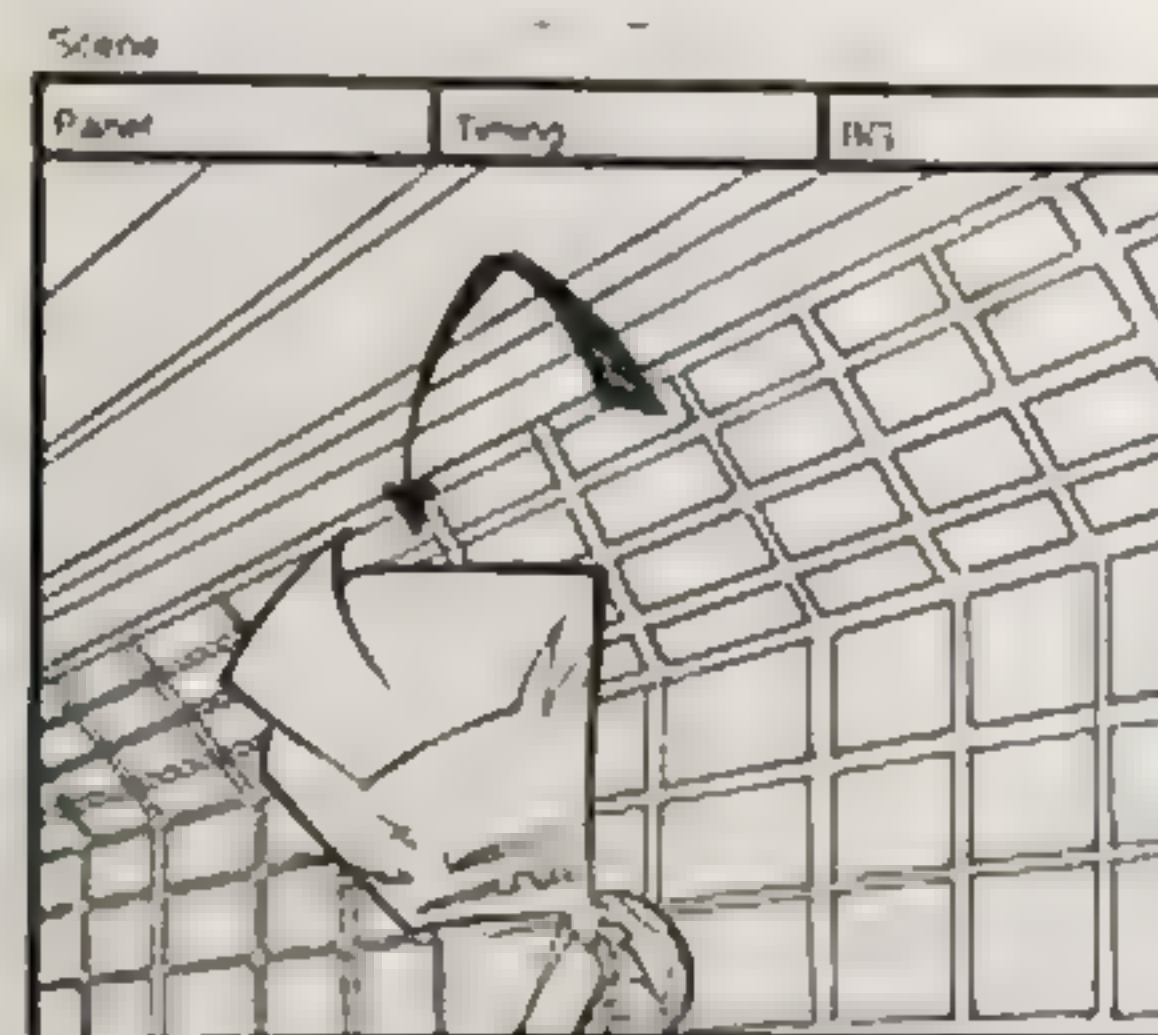
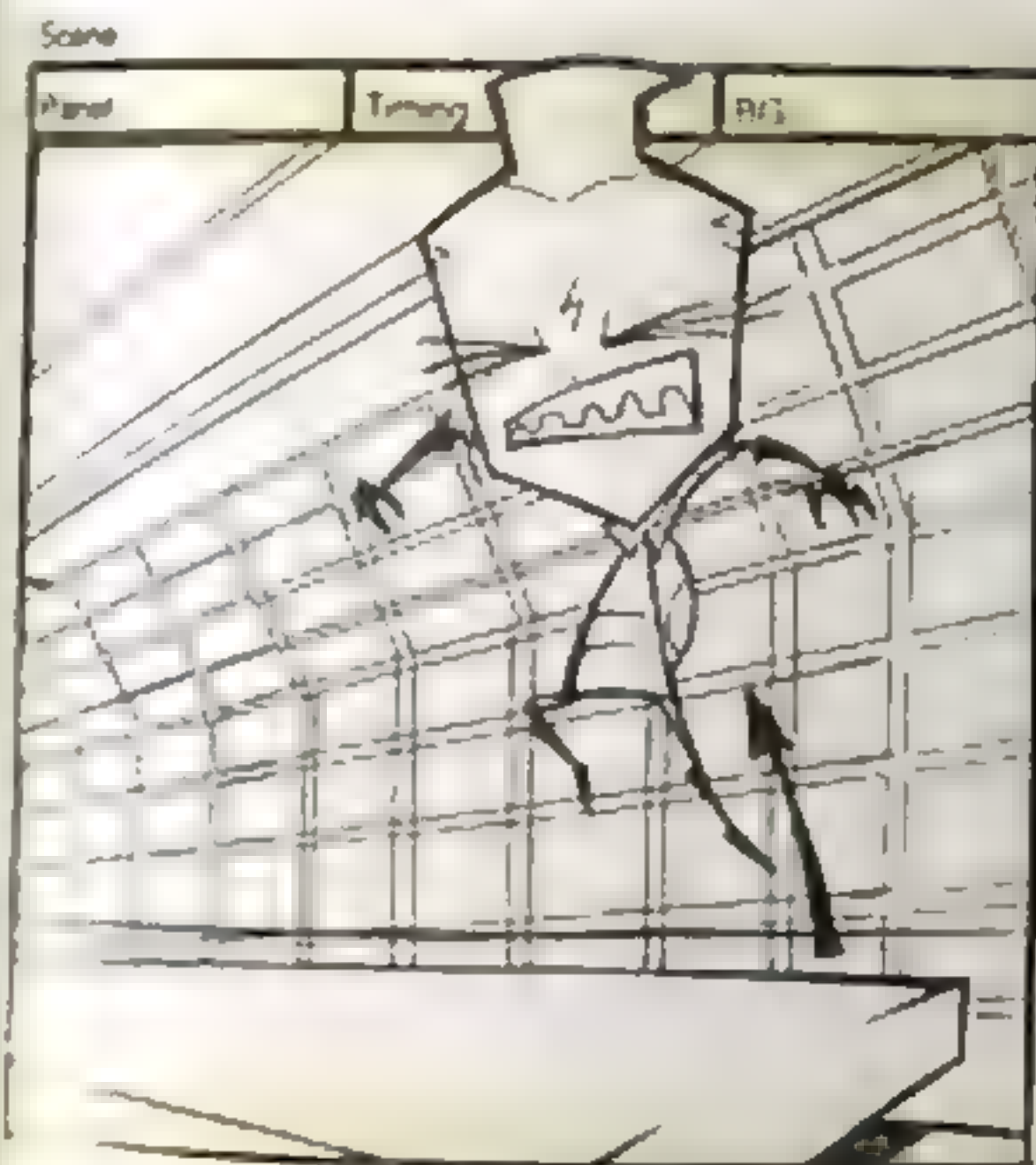
12/11/00



DIALOGUE  
STOP

STREET

THEN LOOKS UP / PAN UP WITH ACTION  
B IS DONE



DIALOGUE



DIALOGUE

12/11/00 12/11/00 12/11/00

AND LANDS ON TABLE TOP.

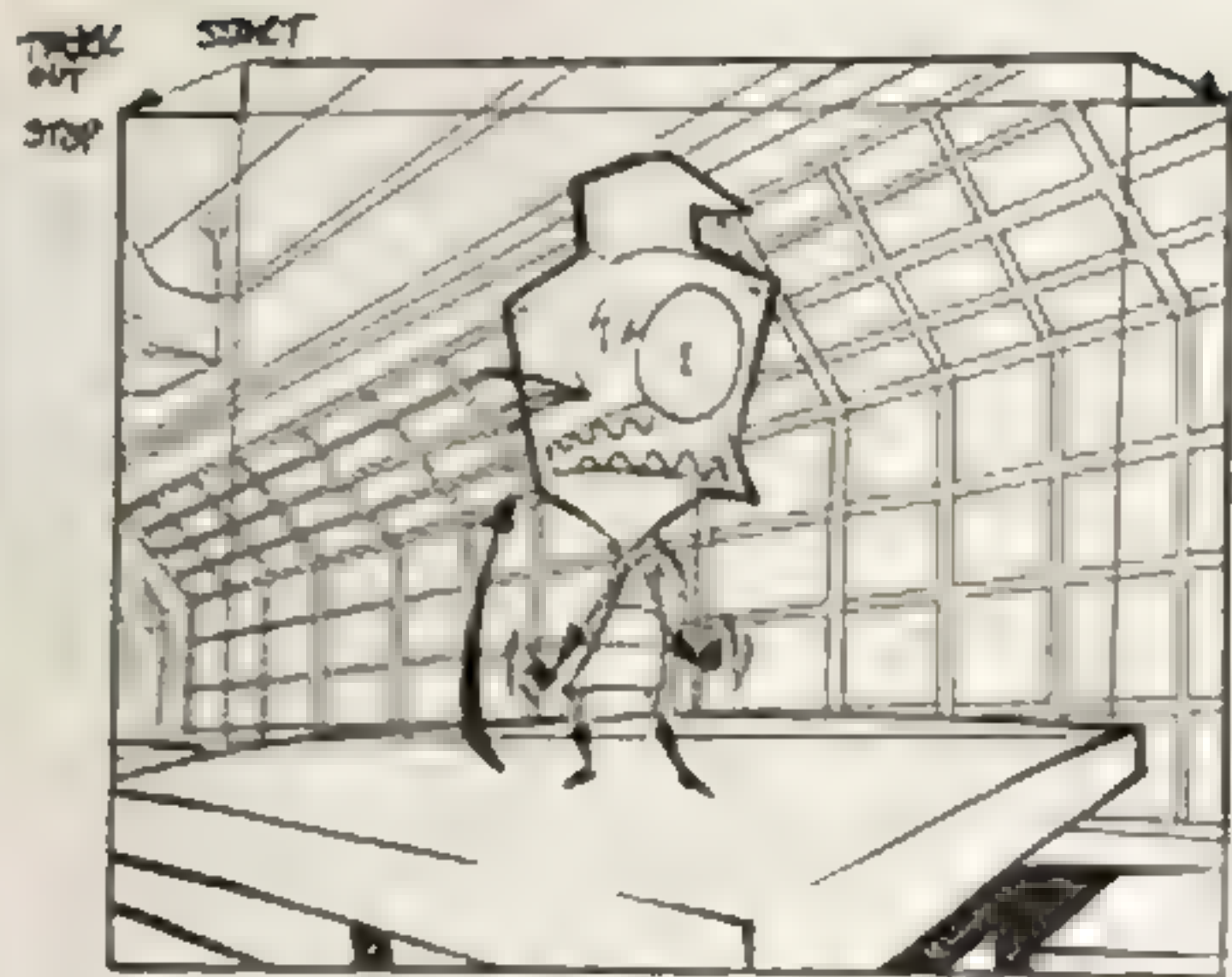
Storyboarders are drawn to illustrate  
the visual action and scenario of an  
episode before animation begins.

"Invader Poochy" was an unfinished Zim cartoon  
that had barely begun production when the series  
was canceled by the network. Along with "The  
Day of Doom," another unfinished eleven-minute

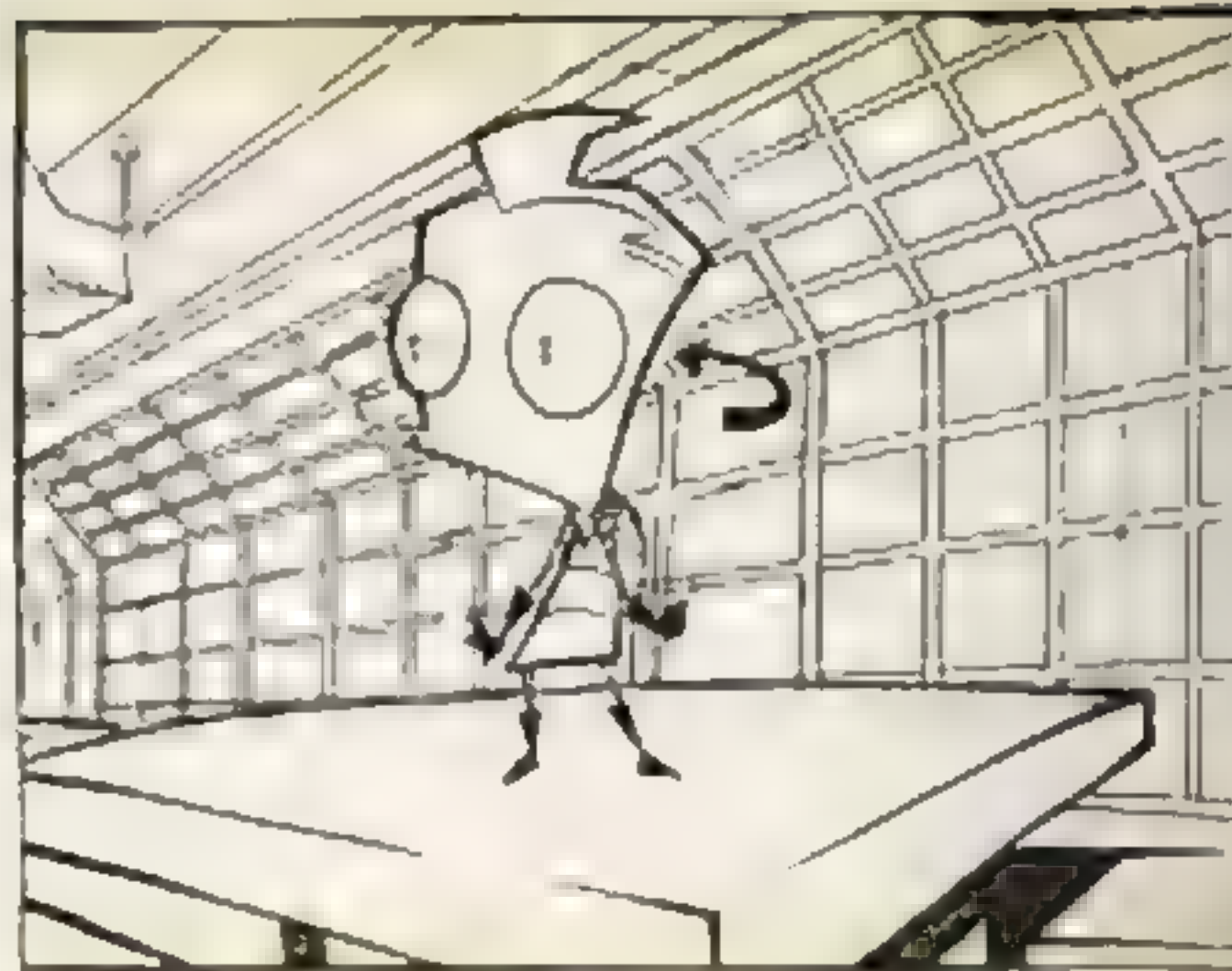
short, the combined two stories would have been  
the twenty-eighth episode of the series. Above

are some of the existing storyboards for the  
unfinished "Invader Poochy" and a color model  
for Poochy.

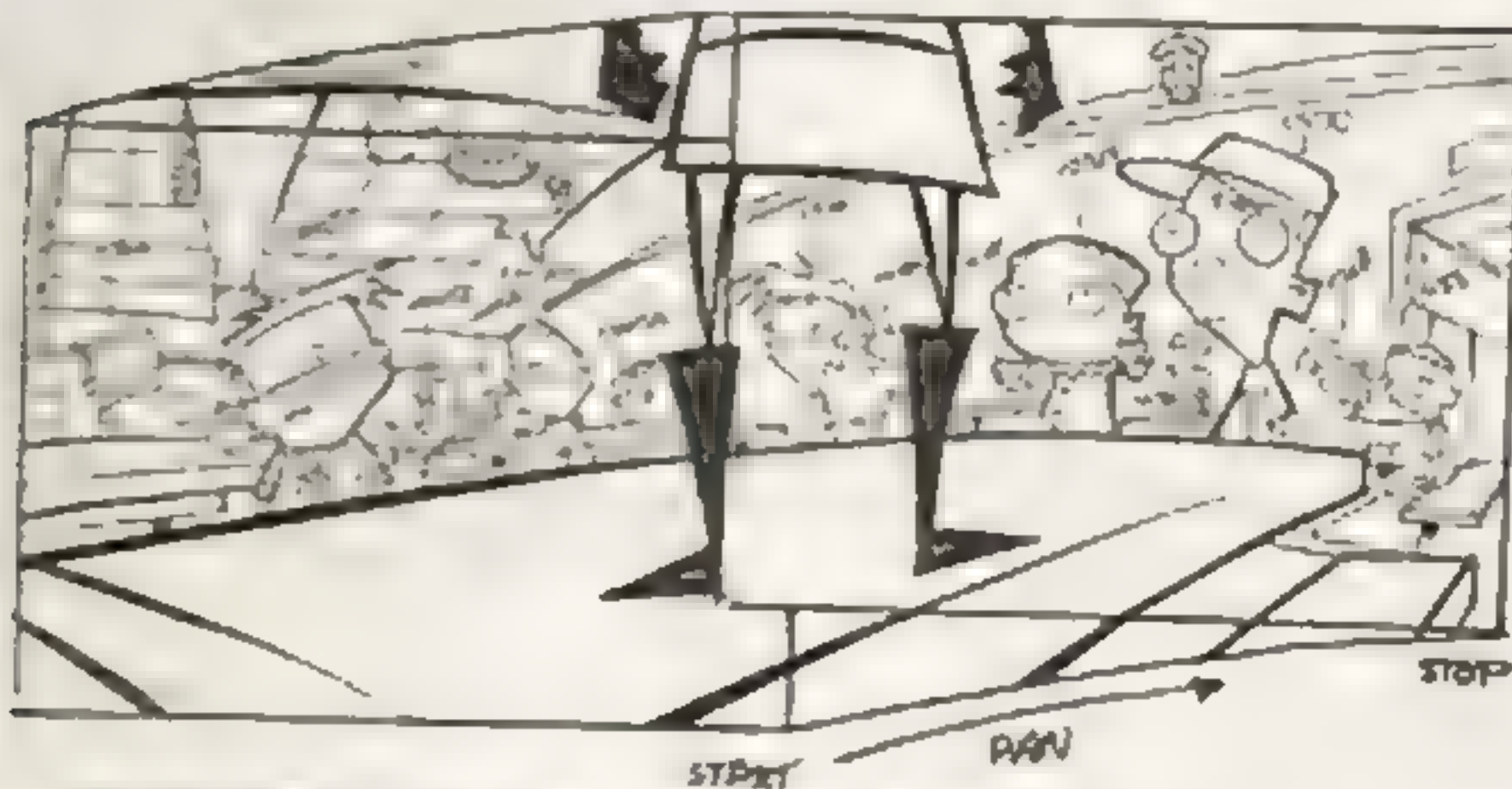




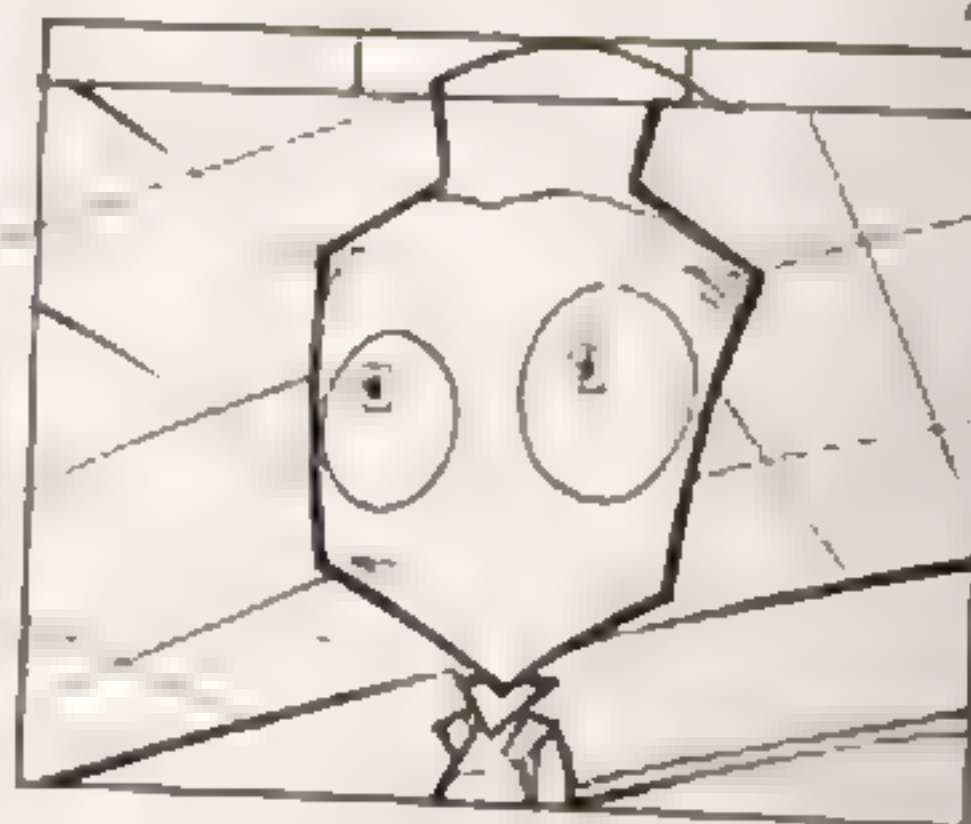
ZIM STARTS HIS FIRST SPEECH WITH A BIG  
LAUGH (HE'S YEAH, HE'S FOR TOO CLEVER.



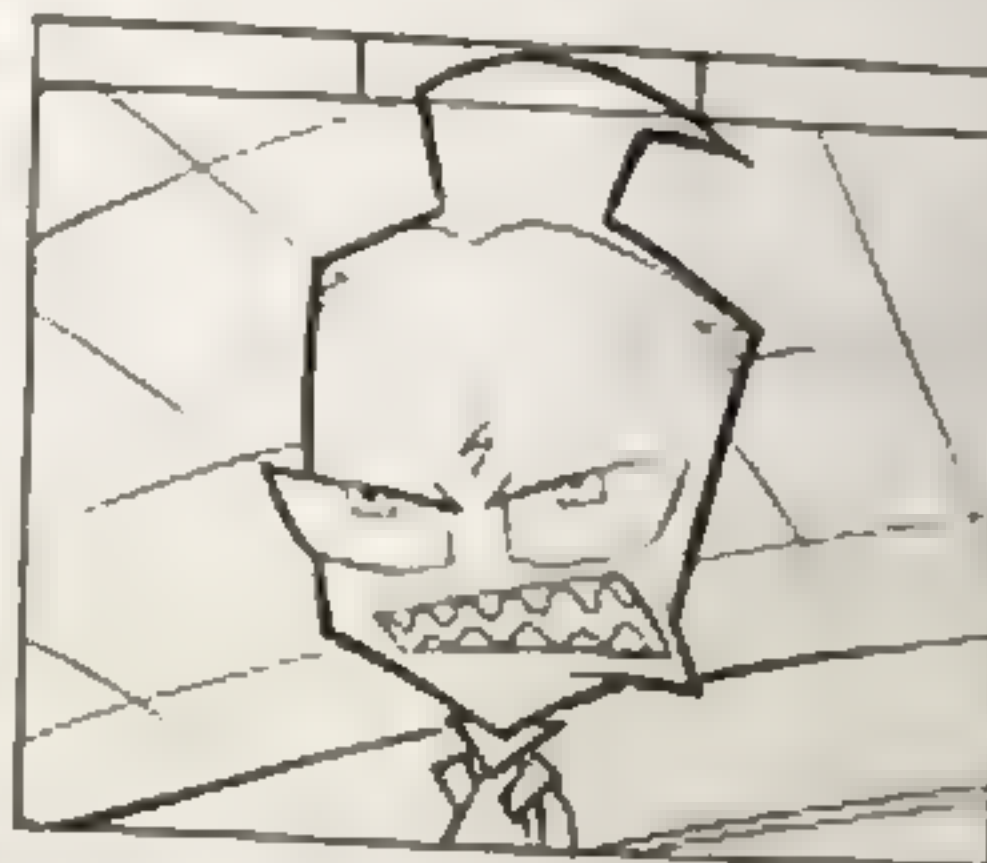
ZIM TURNING AND LOOKS O/S



ZIM IS SPEAKING A LOT OF TIMES, ABOUT THE WAY

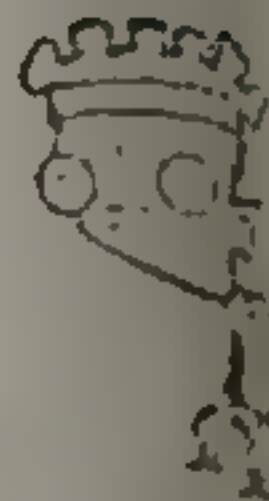


ZIM LOOKS  
TO THE SIDE,  
STRAIGHT



ZIM LOOKS  
TO THE SIDE

STANDS  
AND THE WAY  
ONE OF THE  
BIG MEN  
IS THERE  
IN THE



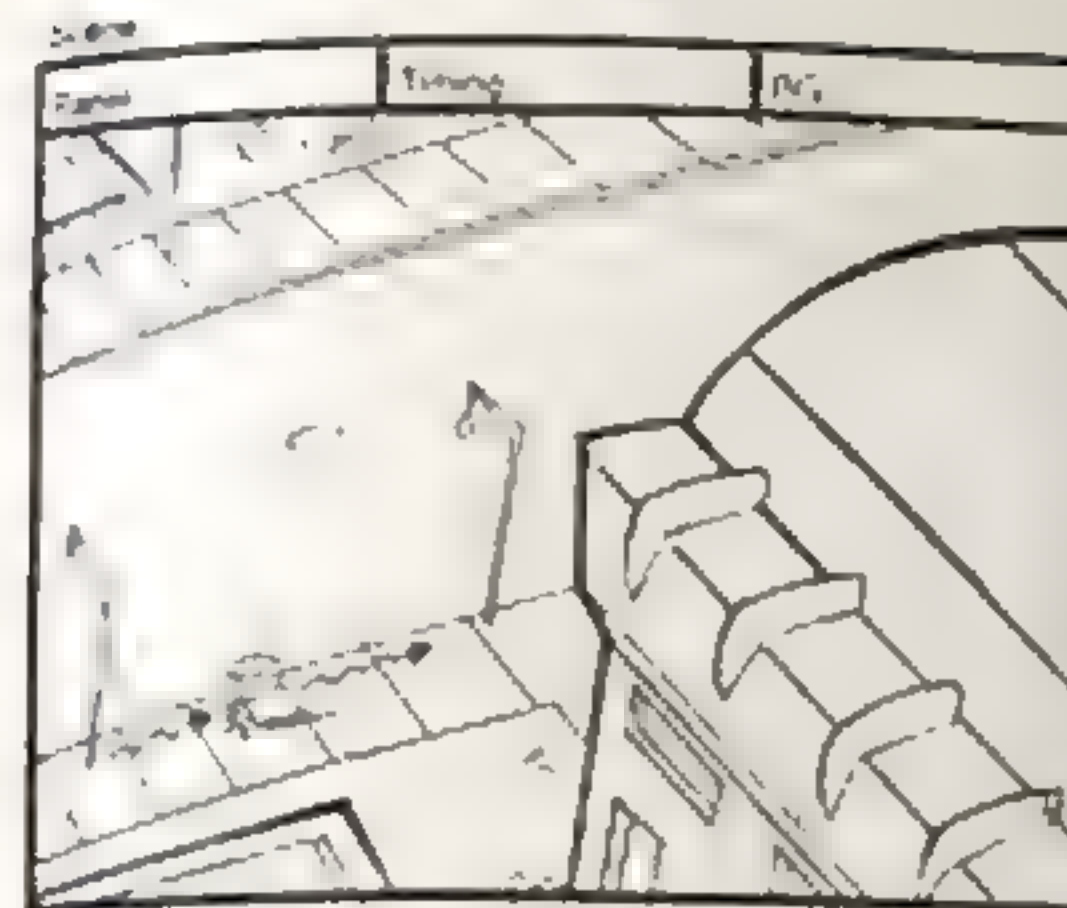
POUNCE  
WANTS TO  
BE A  
BIG MAN

CLARKE



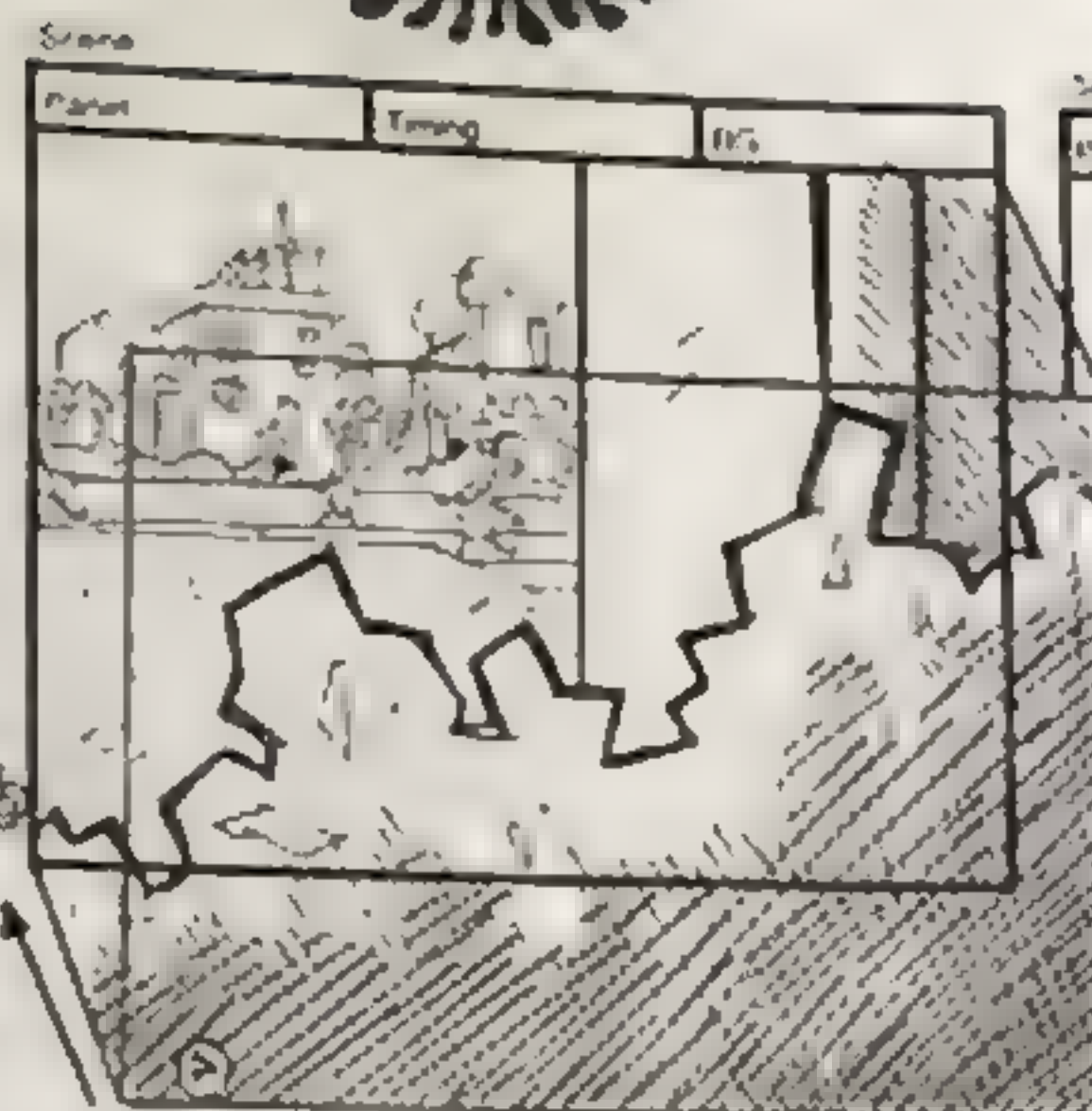
STORYBOARDS





DIALOGUE

POUNCHY WALKS DOWN THE STREET TOWARDS THE HOUSE

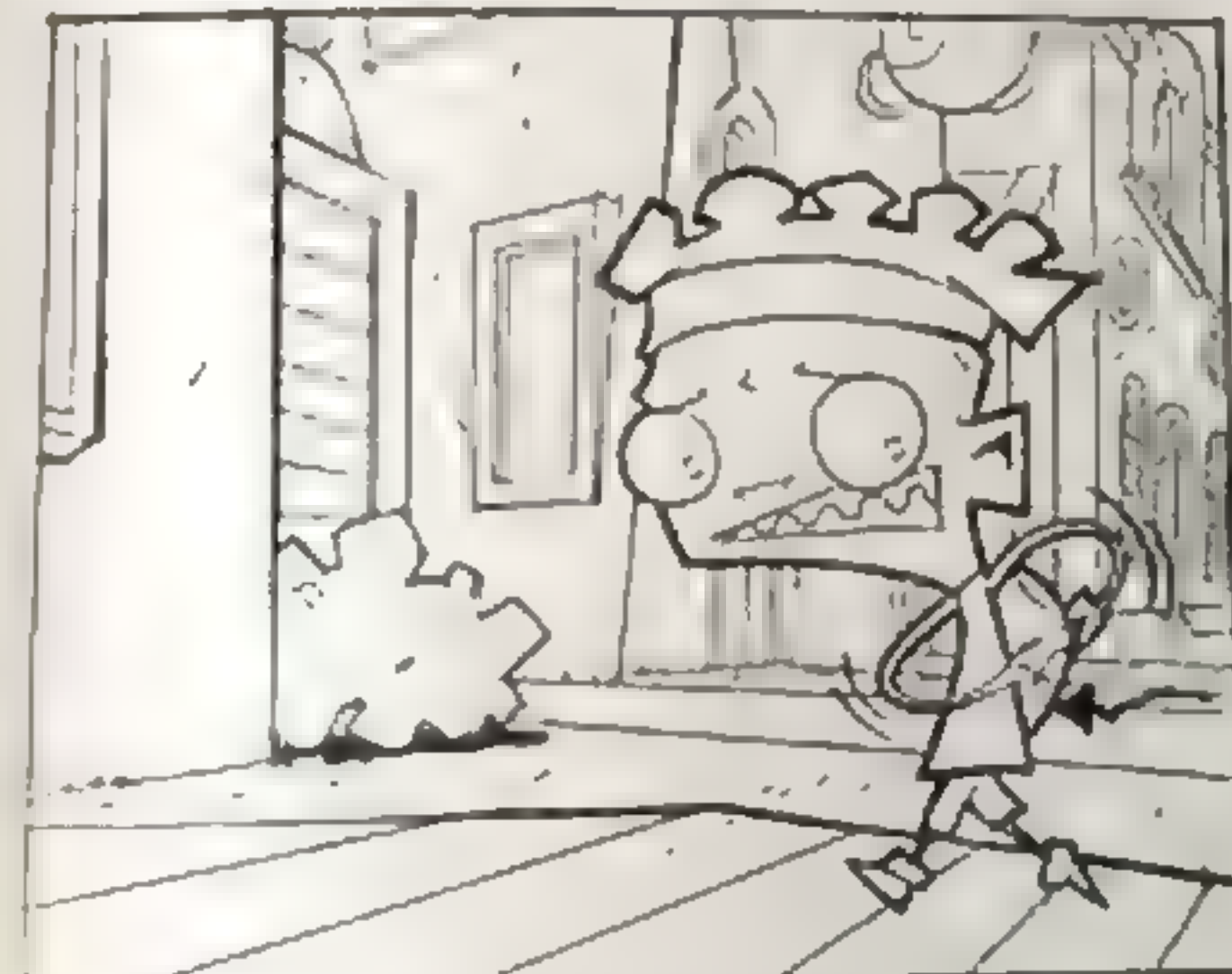


DIALOGUE

POUNCHY THINKS AND WALKS DOWN THE STREET TOWARDS THE HOUSE

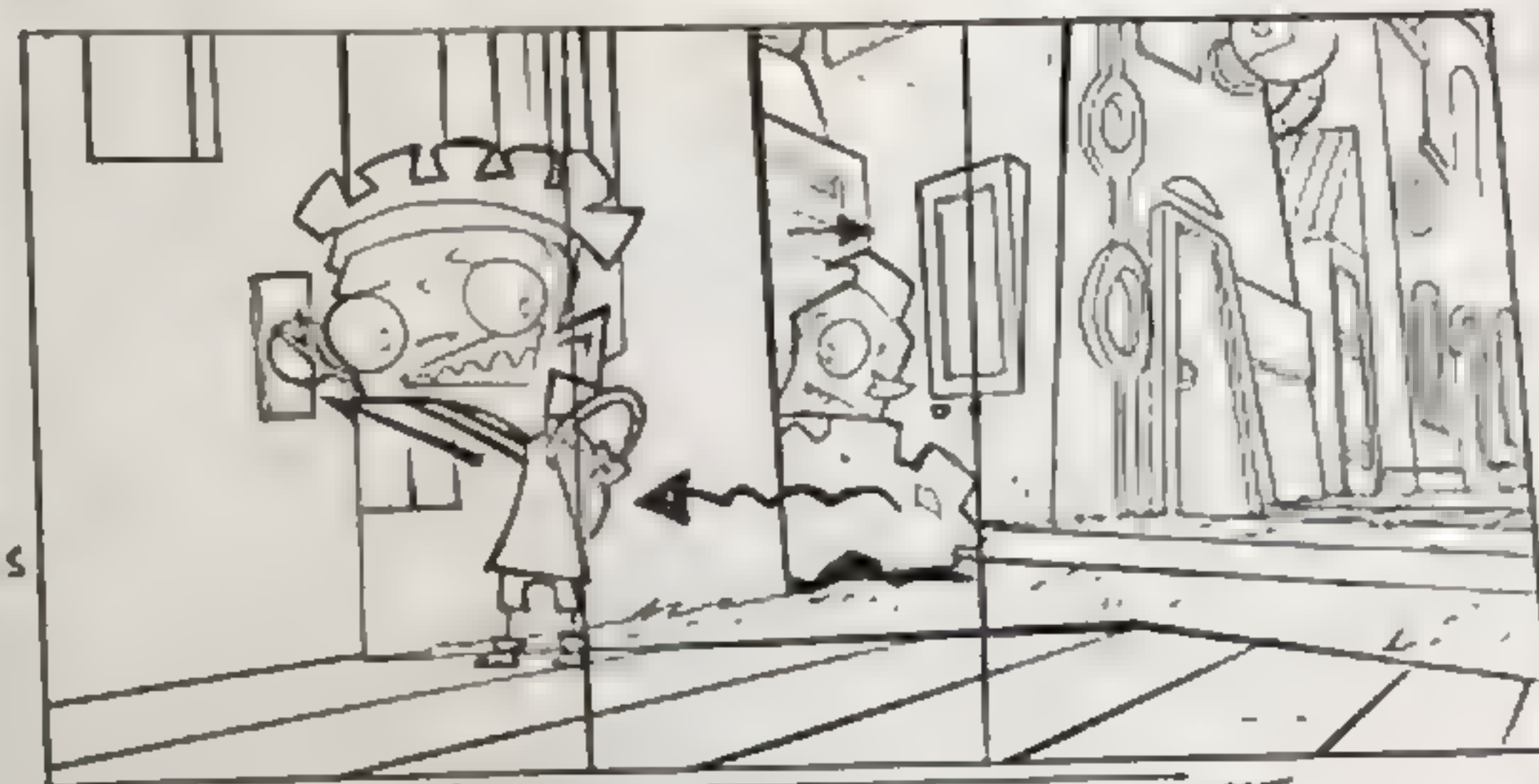
POUNCHY (A) → (B) THEN BACK TO A AS IF SOMETHING HE MIGHT BE WHEN TURN HIS HEAD IN PLACE

CONT NEXT PAGE



INS

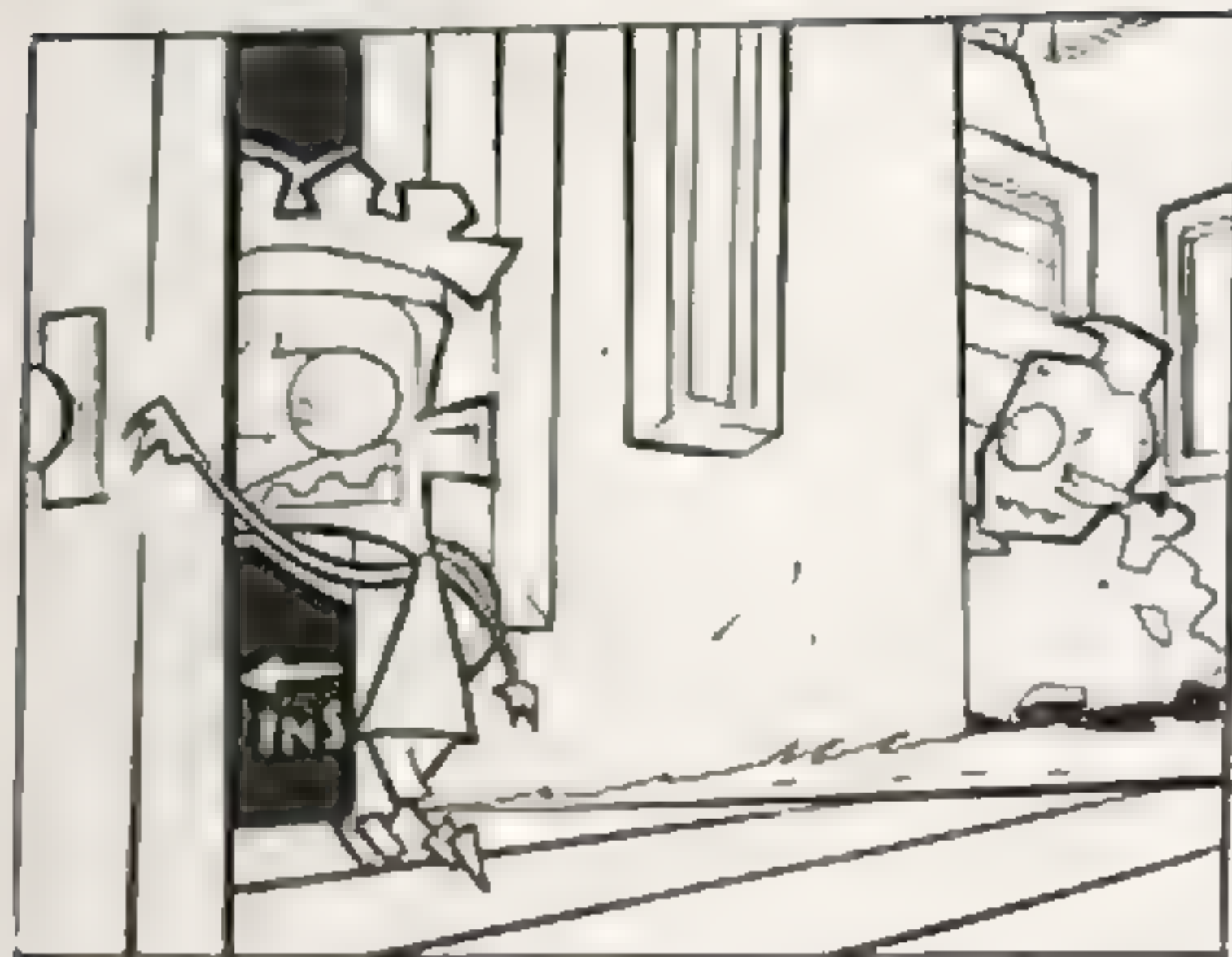
POUNCHY WALKS DOWN THE STREET TOWARDS THE HOUSE



POUNCHY WALKS DOWN THE STREET TOWARDS THE HOUSE WITH ACTION. POUNCHY WALKS TOWARDS THE HOUSE WITH ACTION. POUNCHY WALKS TOWARDS THE HOUSE WITH ACTION. POUNCHY WALKS TOWARDS THE HOUSE WITH ACTION.

This spread: "Inventor Pouchy" storyboards continued, along with designs for Pouchy and Pouchy's men.

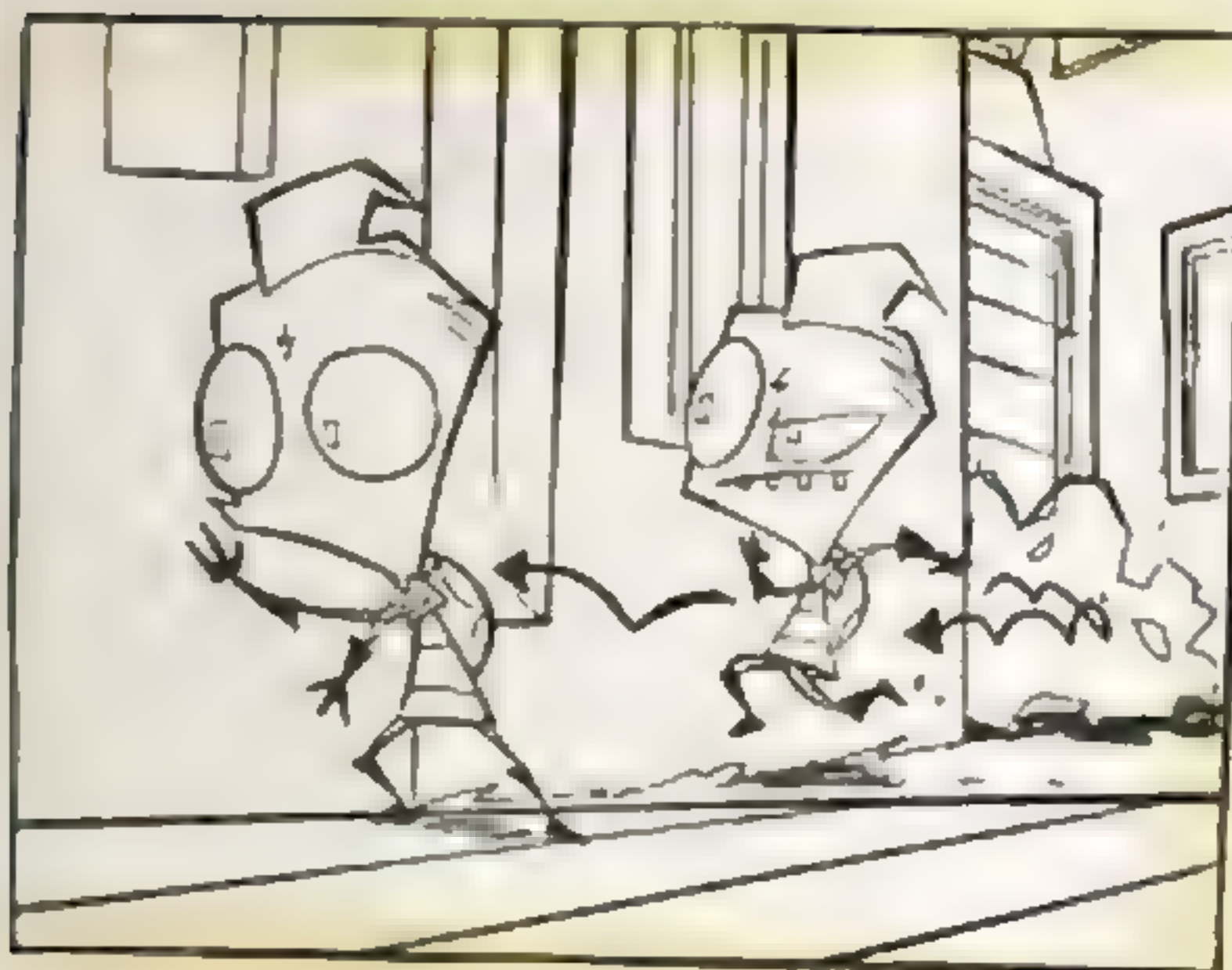




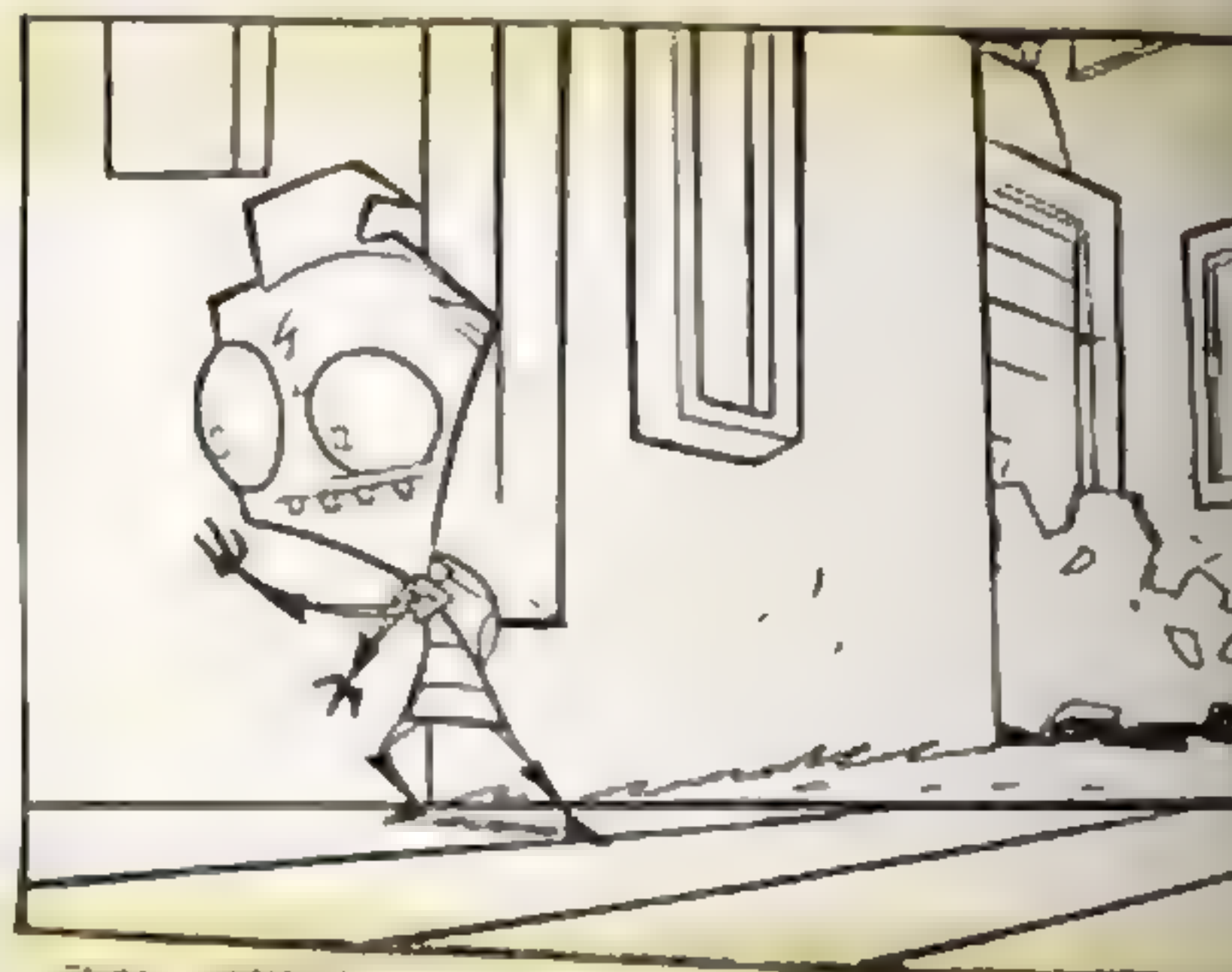
POACHY OPENS DOOR & PALES INSIDE  
ZIM'S HEAD TURNS TO FOLLOW POACHY.



POACHY SHUTS DOOR BEHIND HIM.

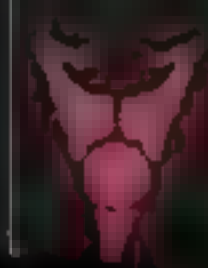


ONCE POACHY HAS ENTERED HOUSE ZIM WALKS AROUND  
CORNER AND PRESSES HIS EAR TO THE DOOR.



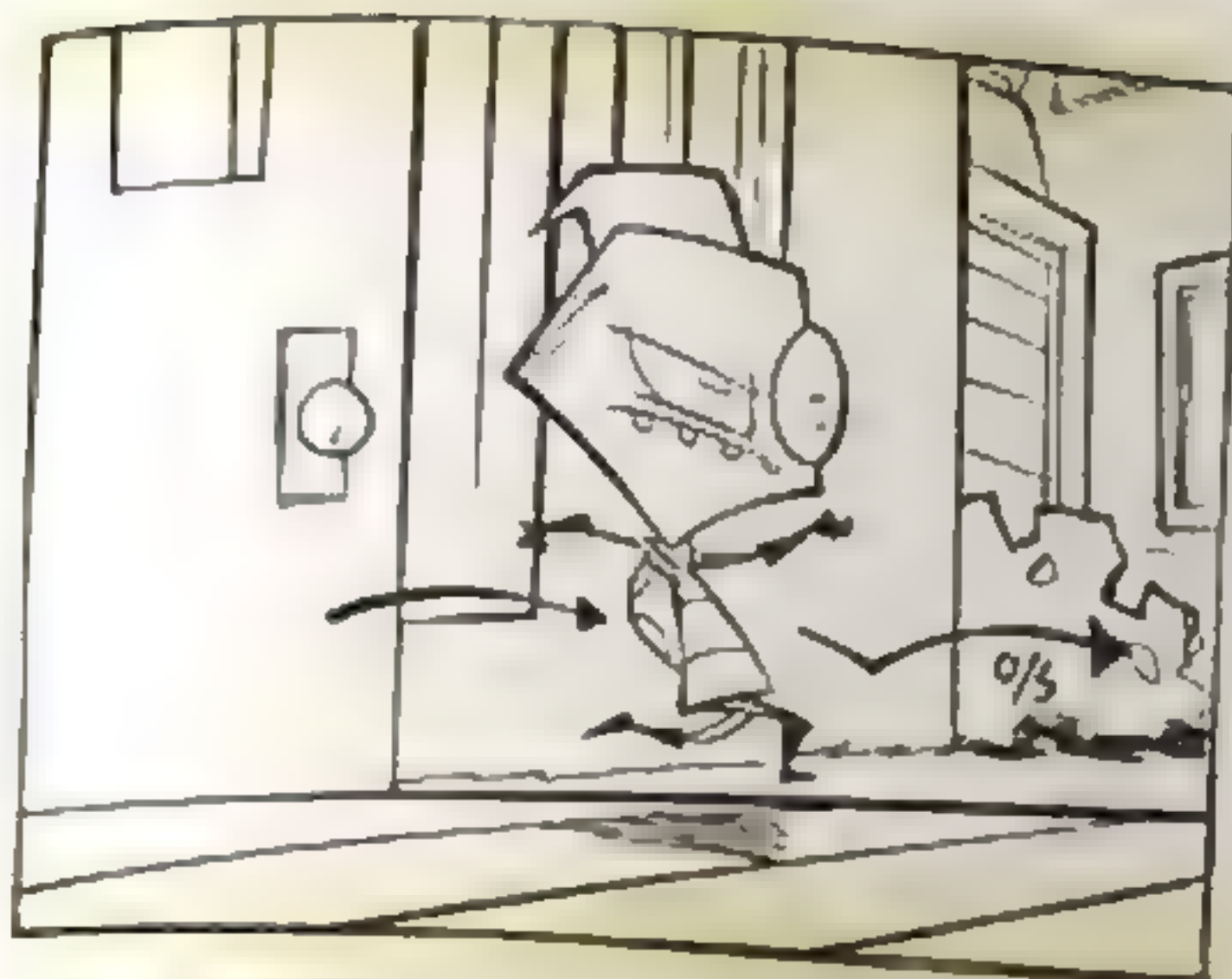
ZIM SMILES NICKEDLY AS HE HEARS POACHY SPEAK  
DIALOGUE:

WOW, SKOOL WAS CRAZY. I'M GONNA GO TO MY ROOM AND  
WIND DOWN WITH SOME VIDEO GAMES YA KNOW? YEAH!



STORYBOARDS





THE TINS AND RUNS O/S AFTER  
HE HAS FINISHED SPEAKING



THE 2 OF PROXIMITY BED ROOM



TRUCK IN ① → ⑤



CONTINUE  
NEXT PAGE →



NEWCASTER  
TODAY PUNCHY

SNITZ

POUNCE OPENS DOOR TO HIS ROOM.

This spread: "Inver Pouchy" storyboards  
continued, along with a design for a newscaster.





NOTE:  
(CARRY 2X ON ALL  
COMPUTER KILLS IN)  
FRANCY'S ROOM.)

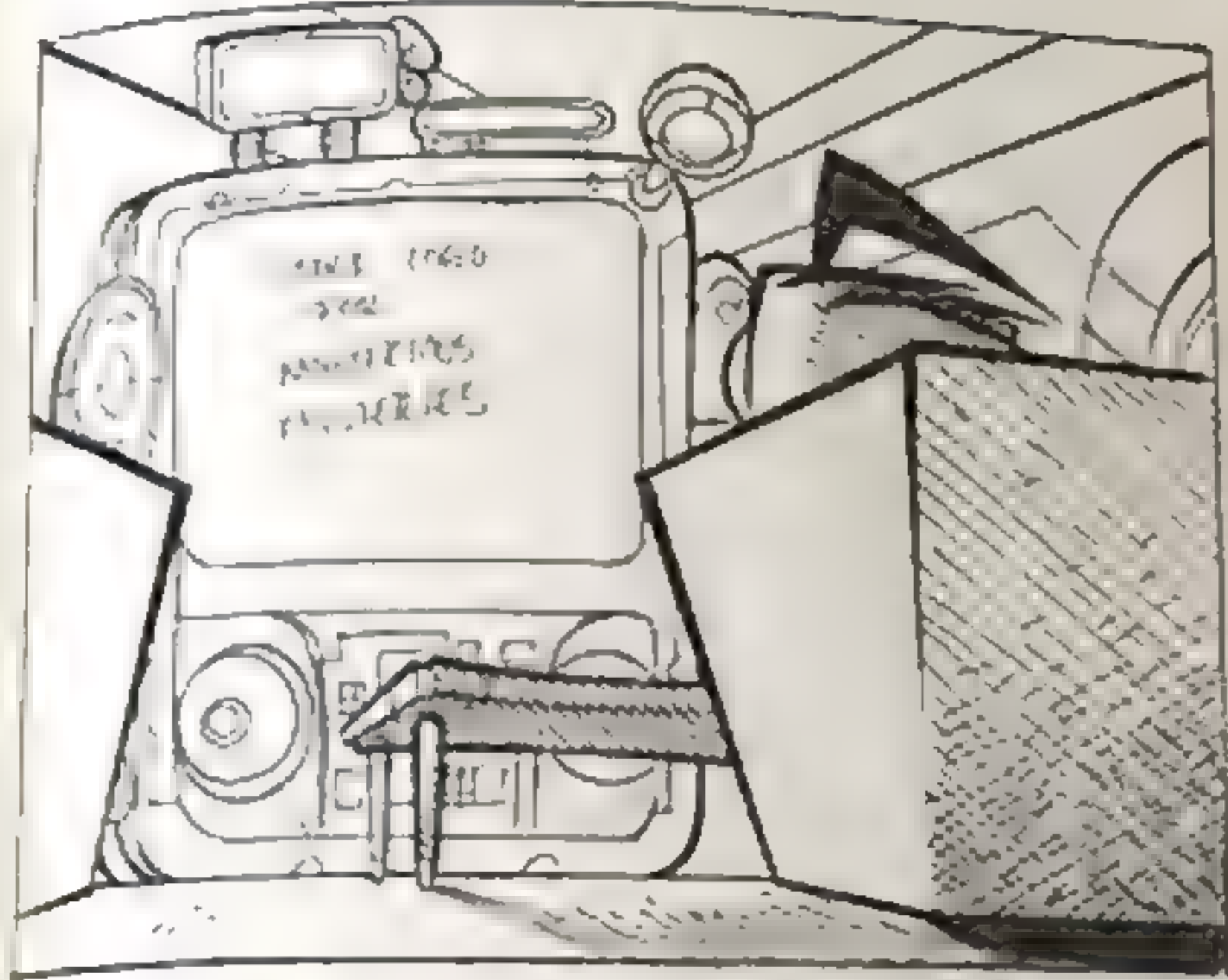


## DIALOGUE

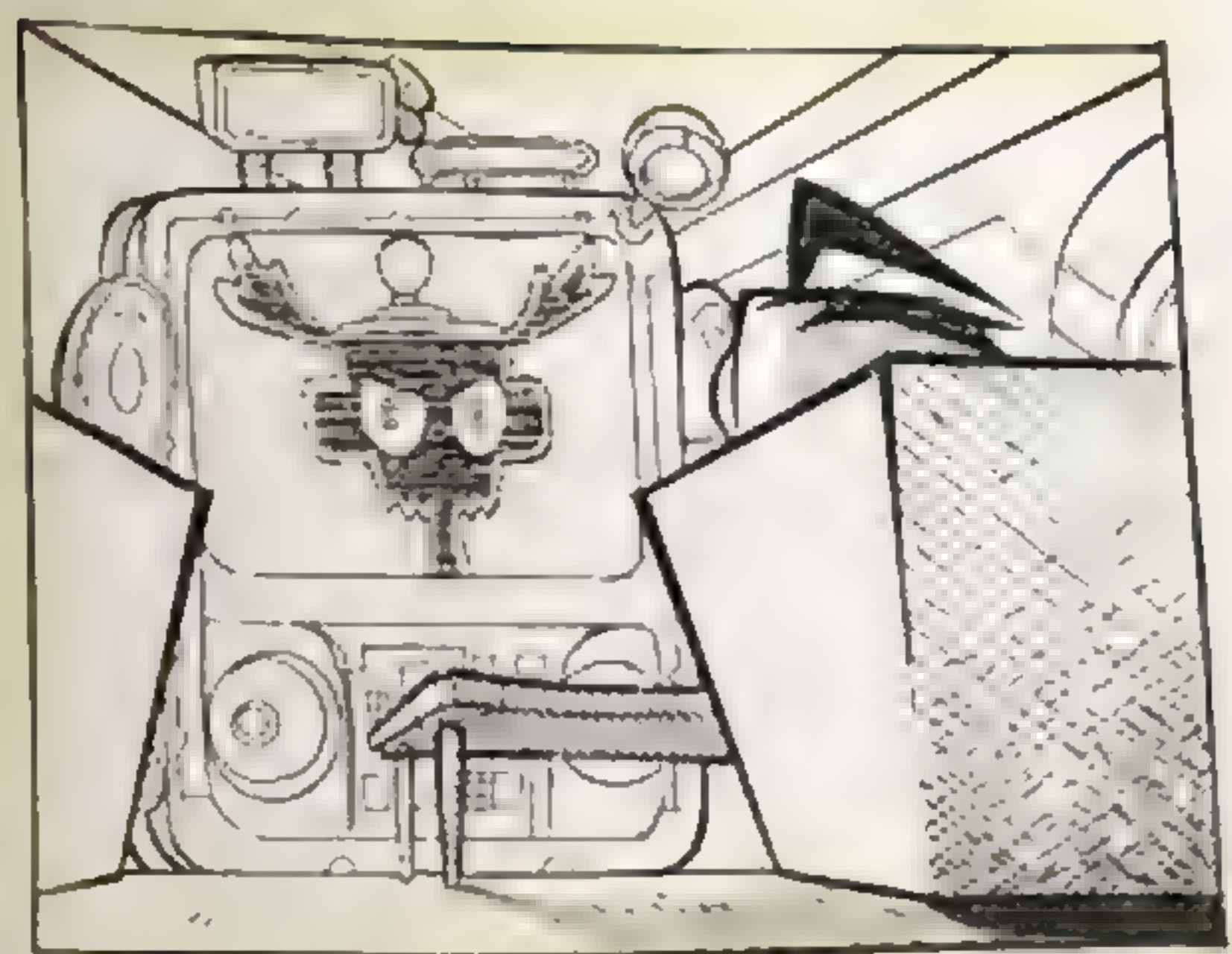
## DIALOGUE

2.8 SFS IN HIS SOUT ROOM  
WATCHING TV (7.15 PM)





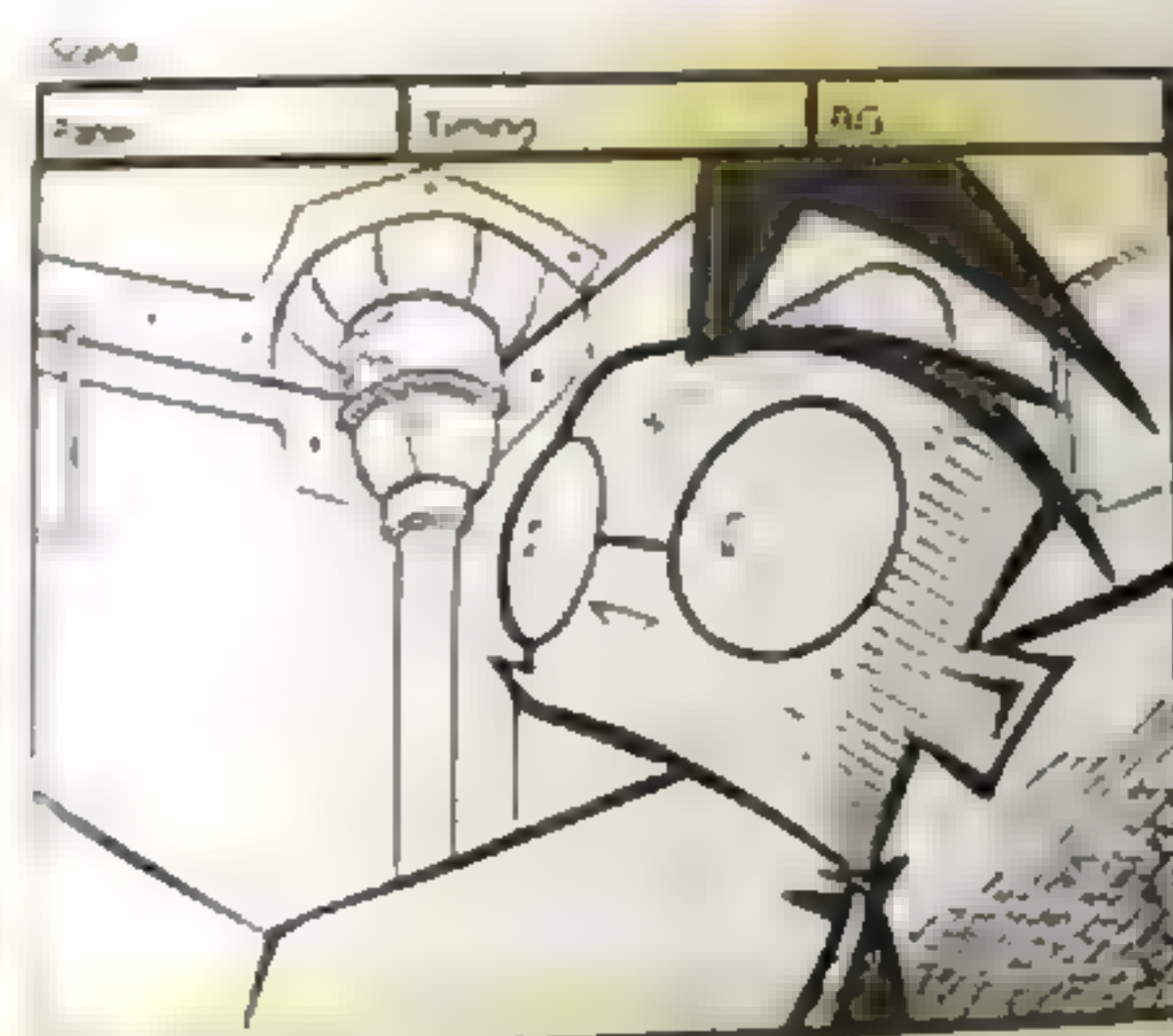
ED IS WATCHING HIS FAVORITE  
SHOW MYSTERIOUS MYSTERIES WHEN...



SUDDENLY A SHADOWY FIGURE BEGINS TO JERK  
ON SCREEN.

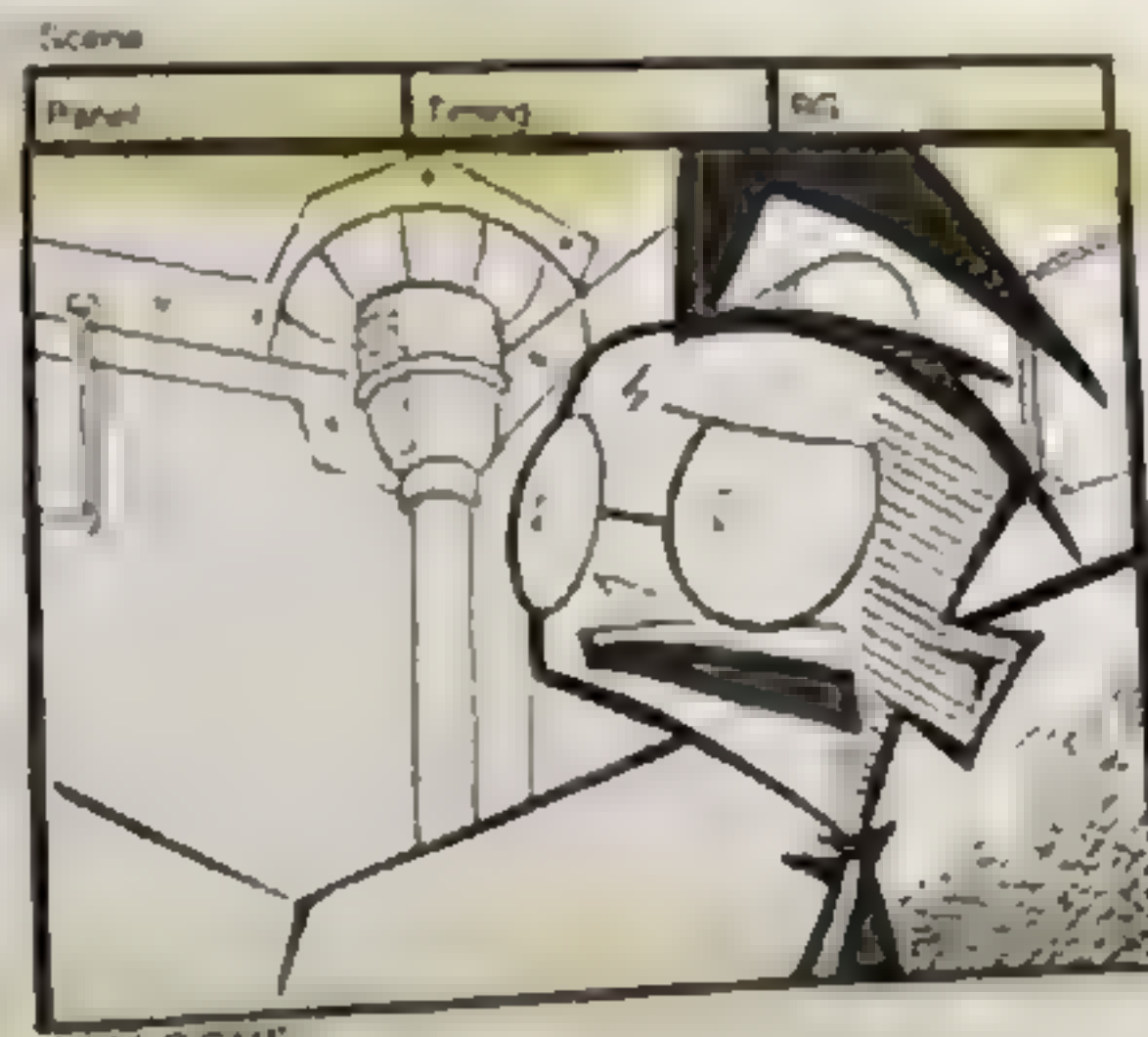
(THINK FOR HIS FAVORITE SERIES 11)

(NOTE P. CREDITS: WHAT THE?)  
SC. \_\_\_\_\_ THRU 3 \_\_\_\_\_



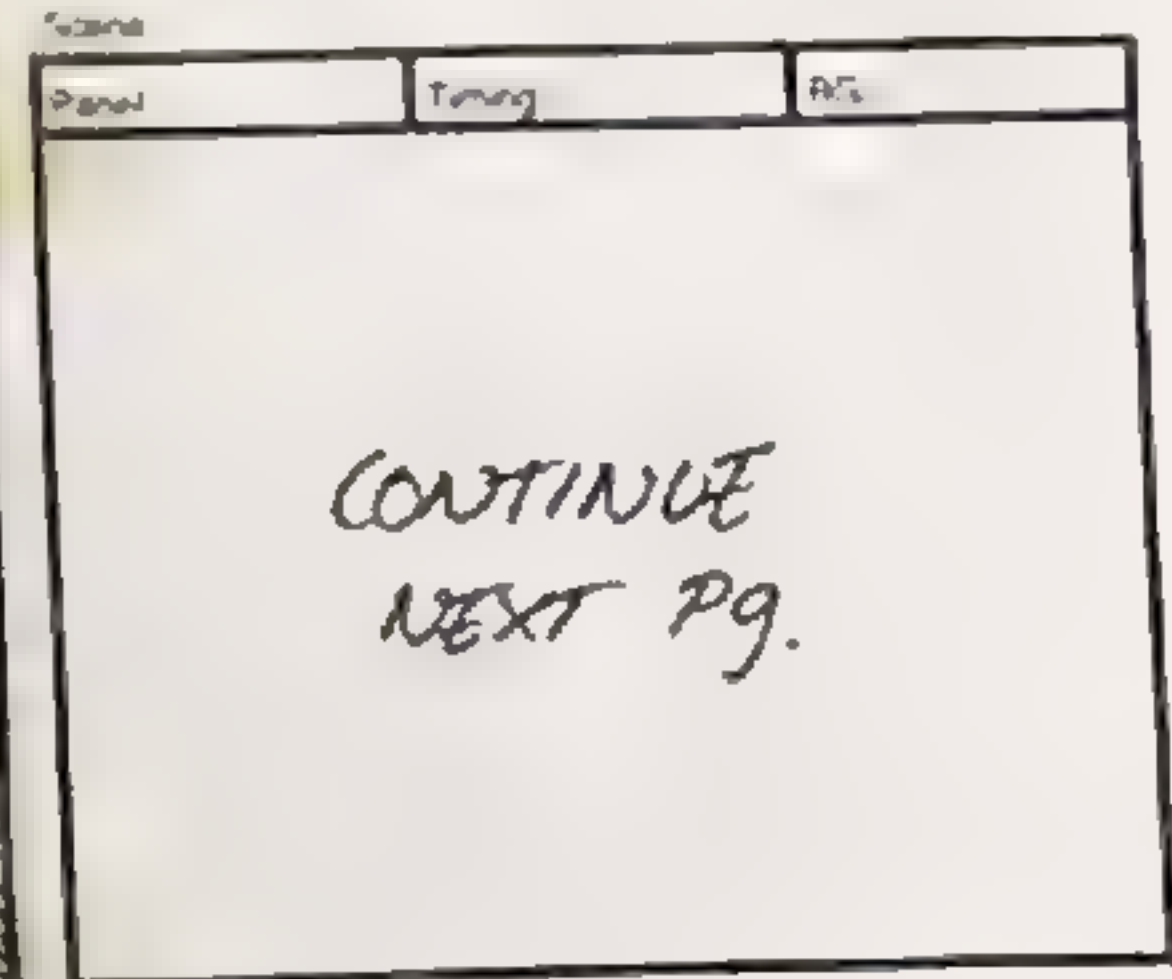
ALOGUE

ED IS THINKING AT SCREEN CONFUSED



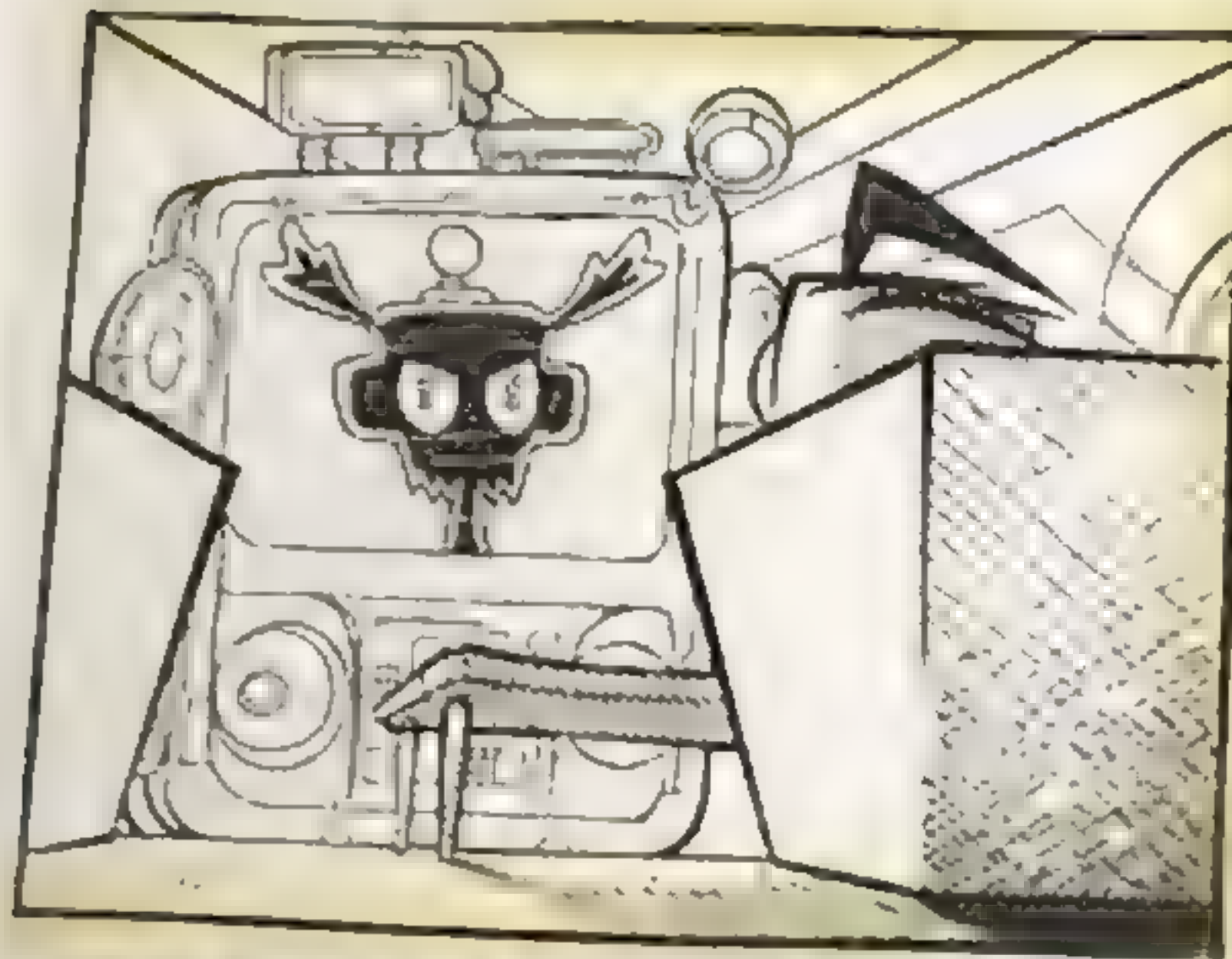
DIALOGUE

WHAT THE-?

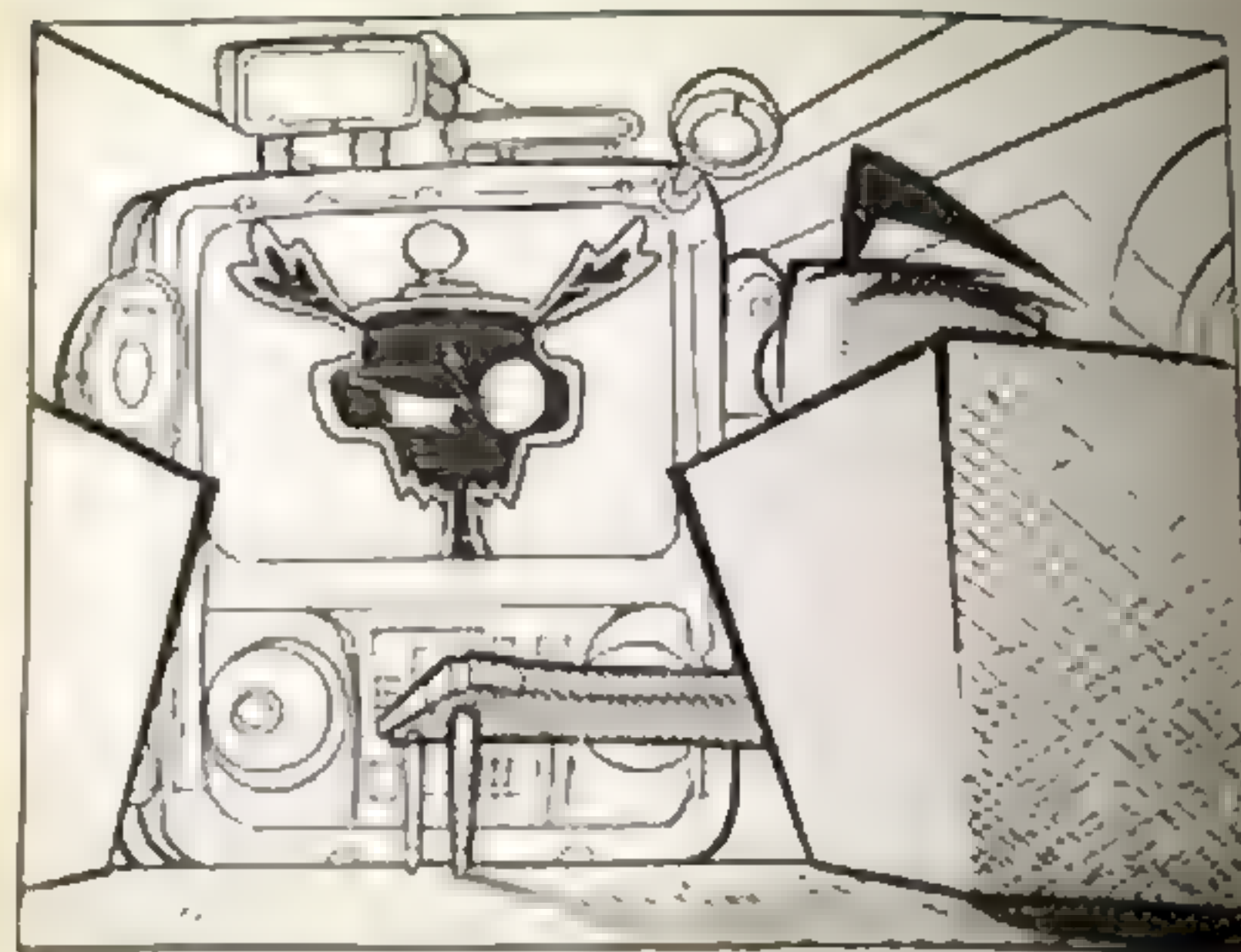


DIALOGUE

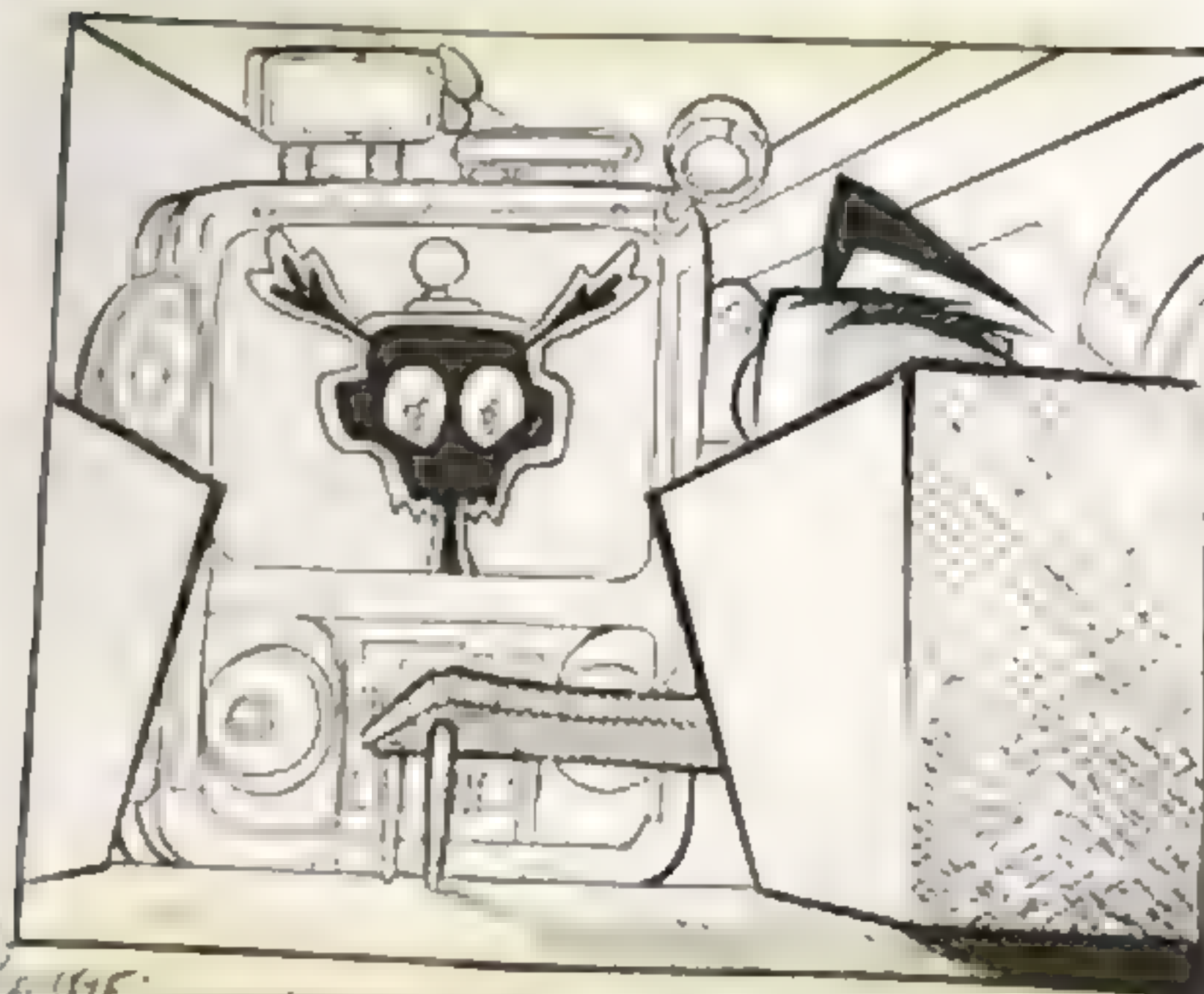




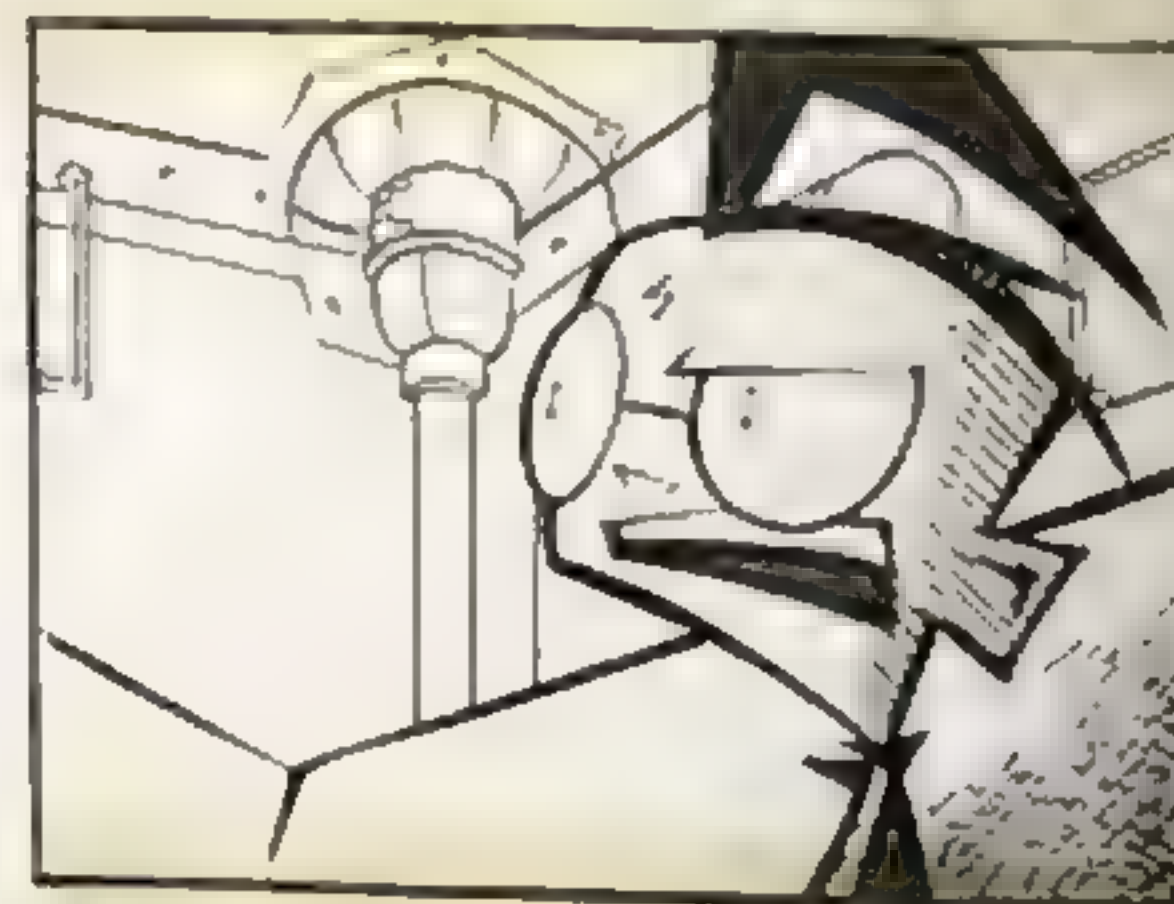
1. I AM HERE TO TALK TO THE  
 1. I AM HERE TO TALK TO THE  
 1. I AM HERE TO TALK TO THE



2. I AM HERE TO TALK TO THE  
 2. I AM HERE TO TALK TO THE  
 2. I AM HERE TO TALK TO THE

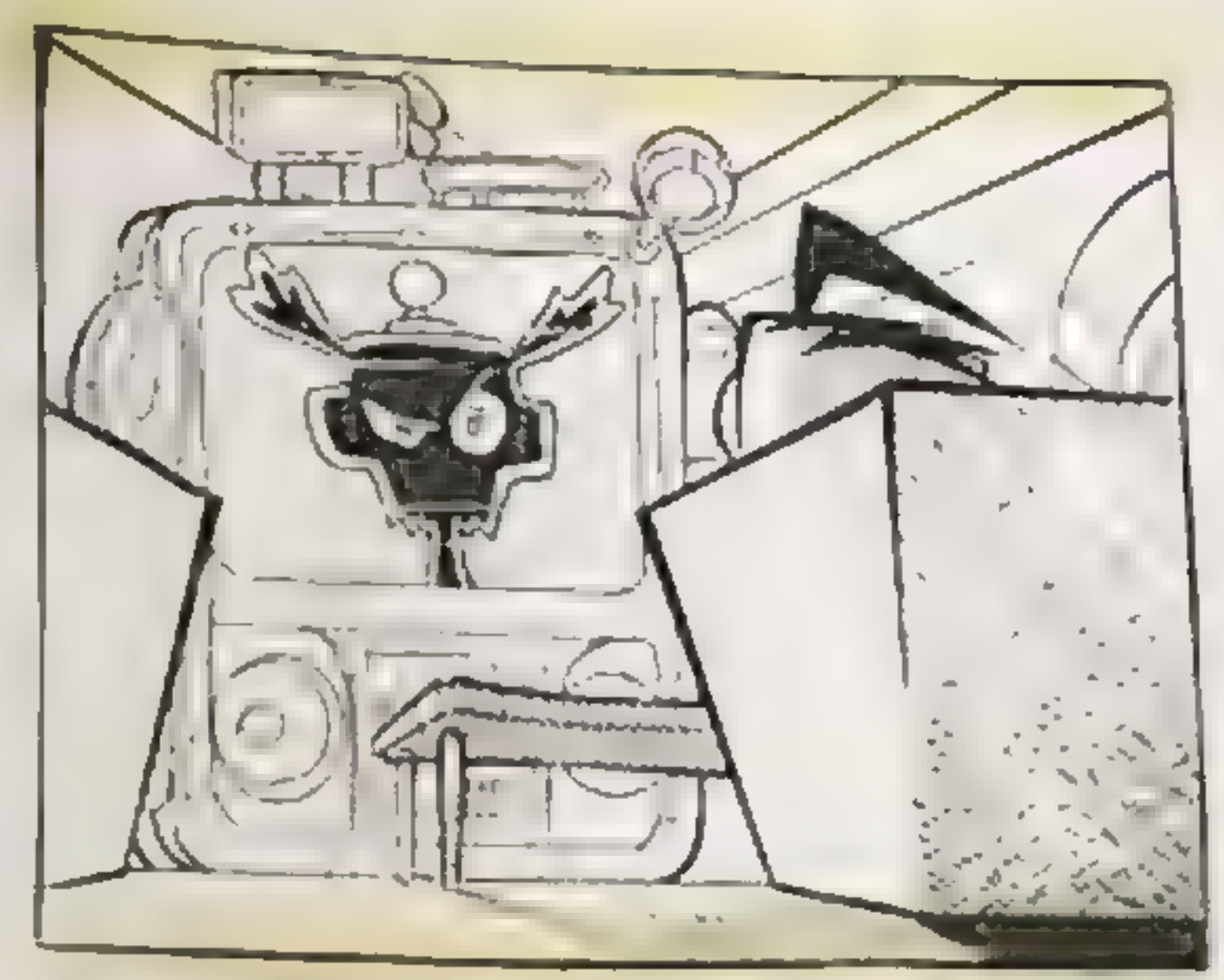
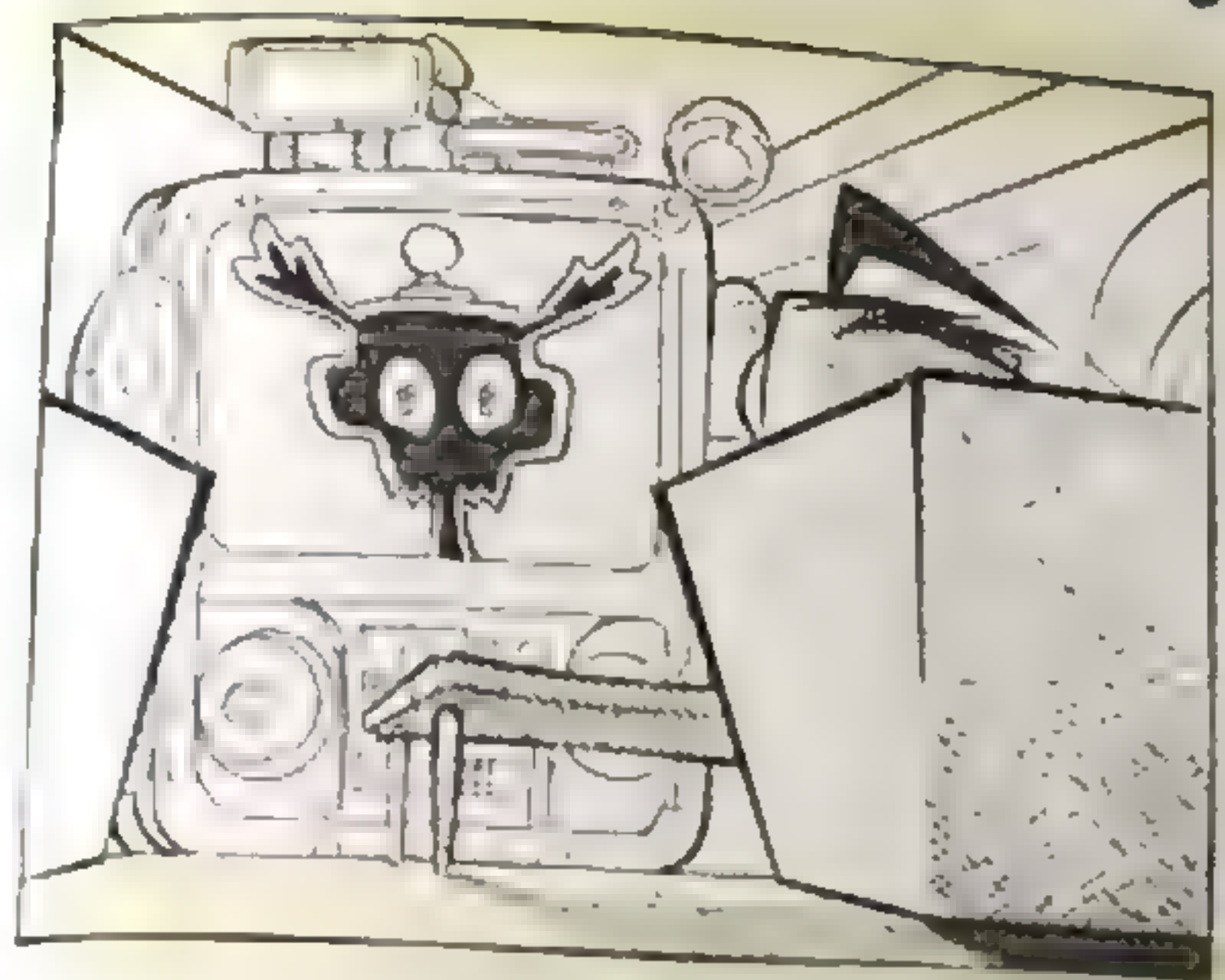


3. I AM HERE TO TALK TO THE  
 3. I AM HERE TO TALK TO THE  
 3. I AM HERE TO TALK TO THE

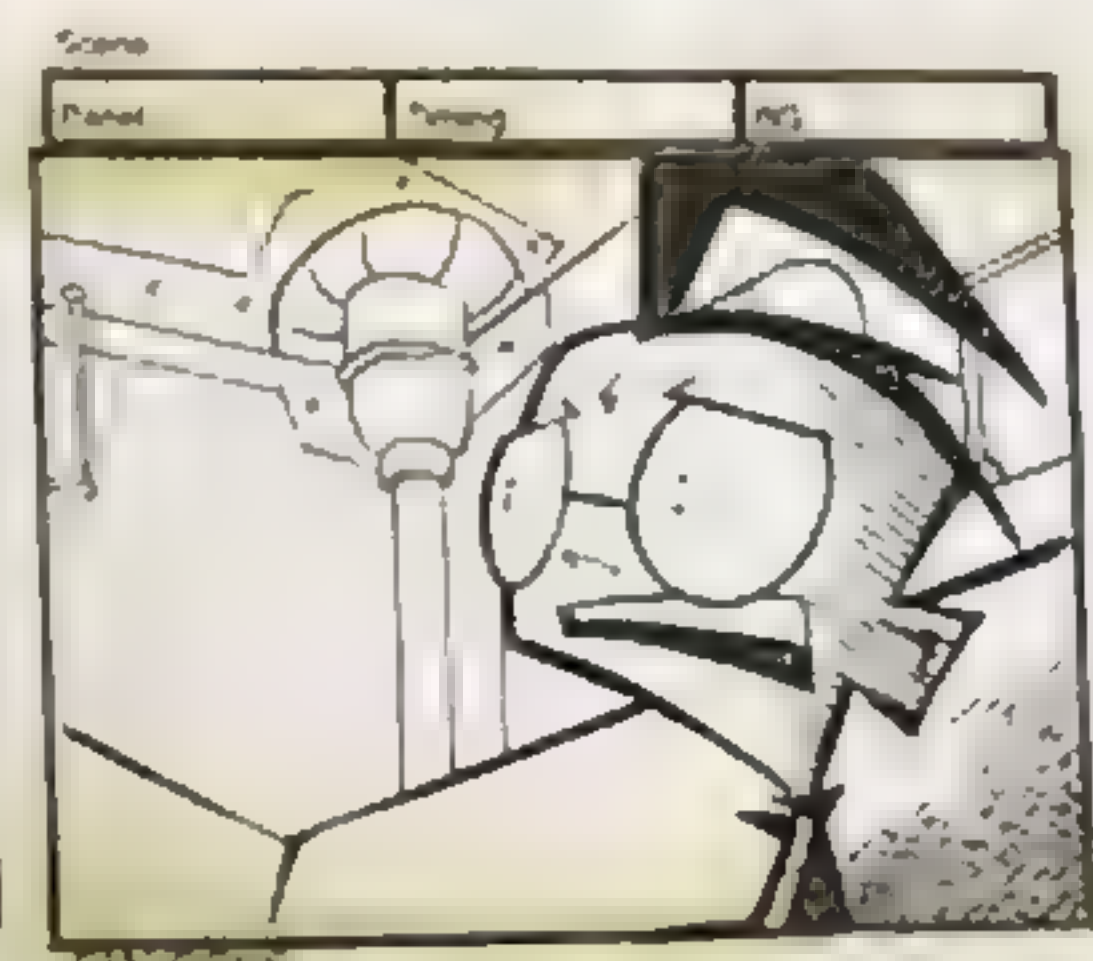
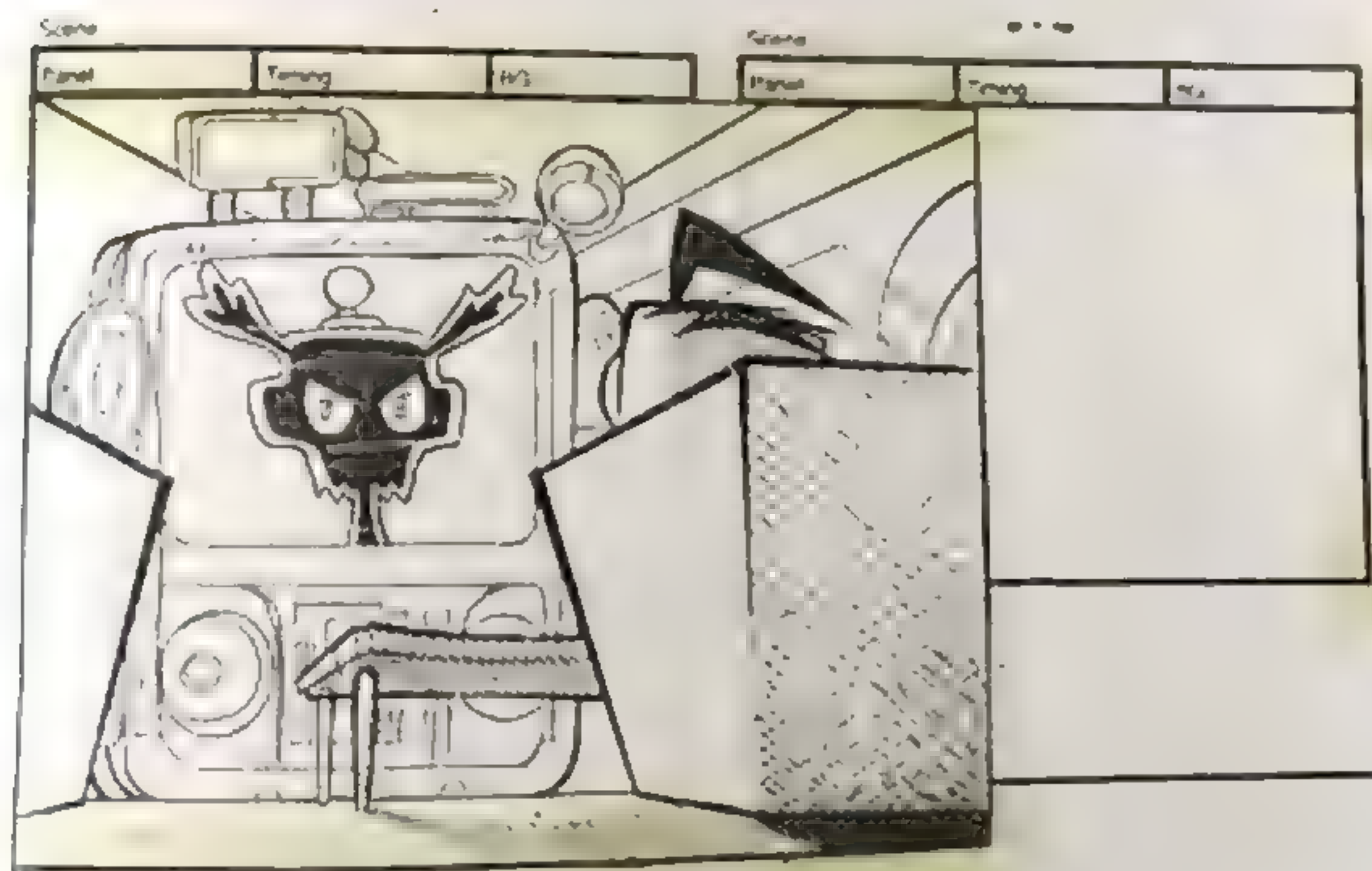


DIALOGUE:  
 SHOULD WE TALK TO THE  
 IVE NEVER HEARD OF ANY MORE





2ND SHOTS  
CUT TO: ...



DIALOGUE

CRAYN...

② DIALOGUE:

WE ASKED YOU TO INVESTIGATE SOME  
ALIEN SIGNALS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

This spread: "Invader Peonchy" storyboard  
continued.





DIALOGUE

WE SEE THE HOUSE OF THE NIGHT  
HOUSE  
SLOW TRUCK IN AS DID CLIMBS

- 1) I DUNNO
- 2) ABOUT THIS
- 3) SWOLEN NORTBALL ...



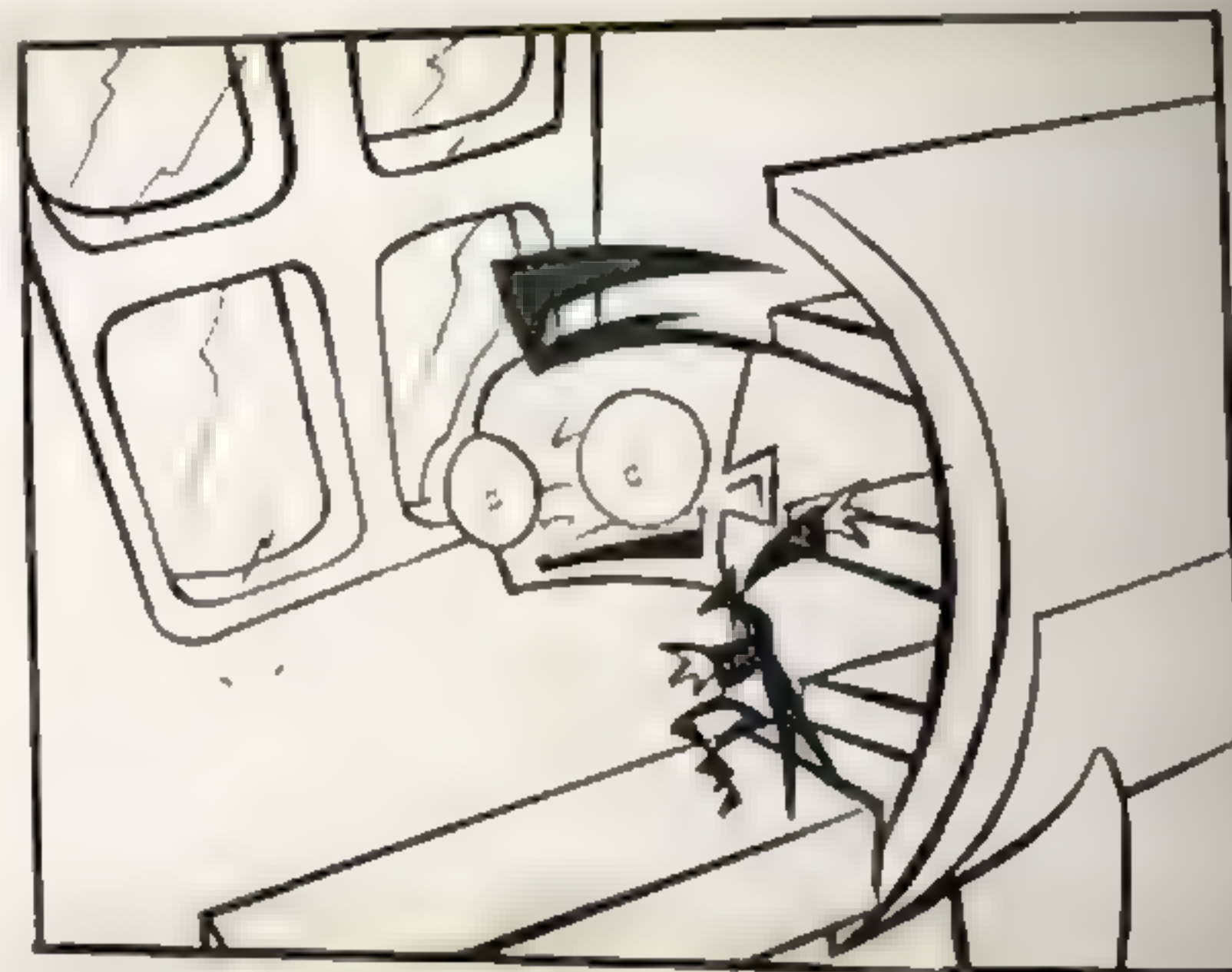
DIB MAKES HIS WAY UP TO WINDOW

DIALOGUE ① IF ...



DIB CONTINUES CLIMBING

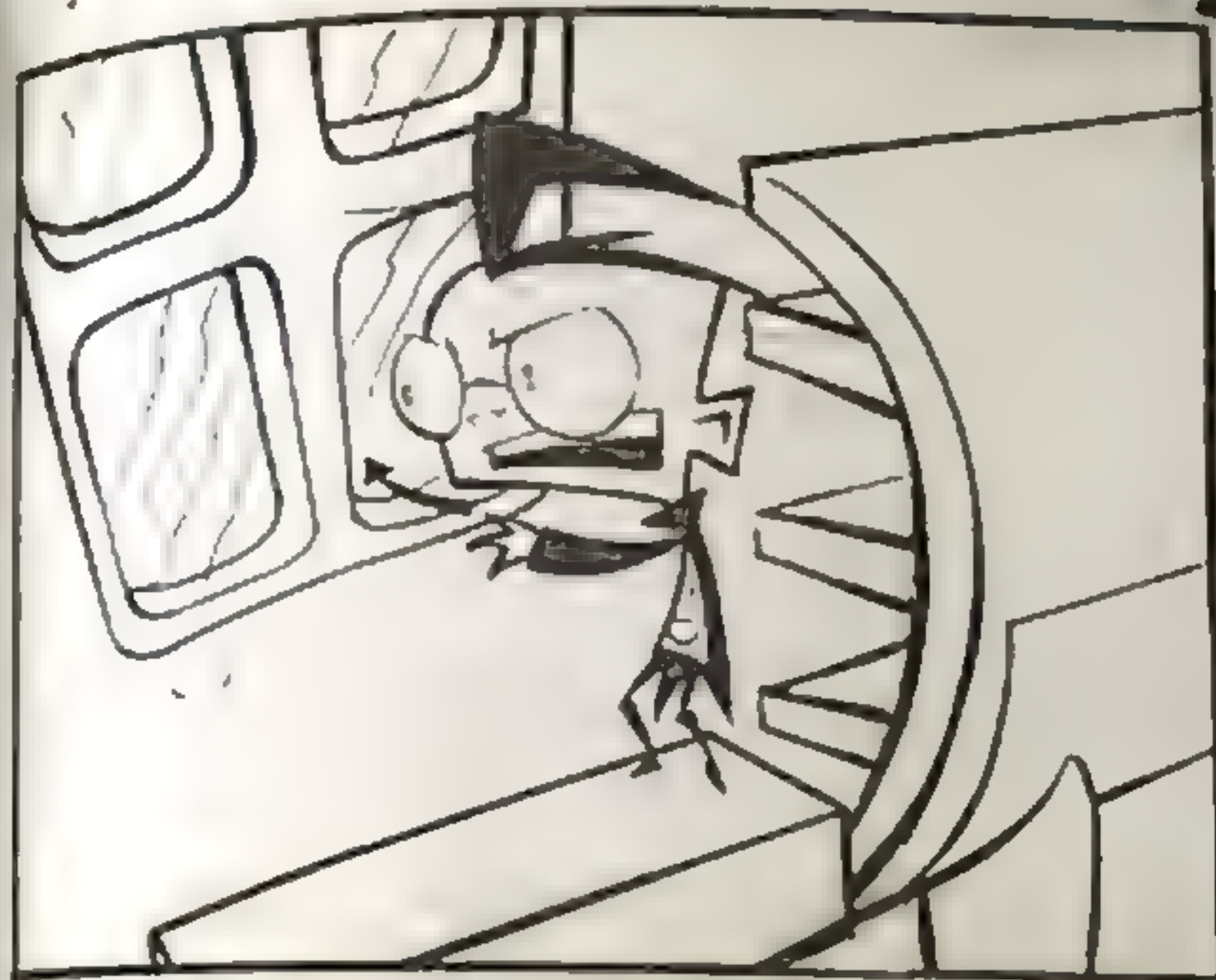
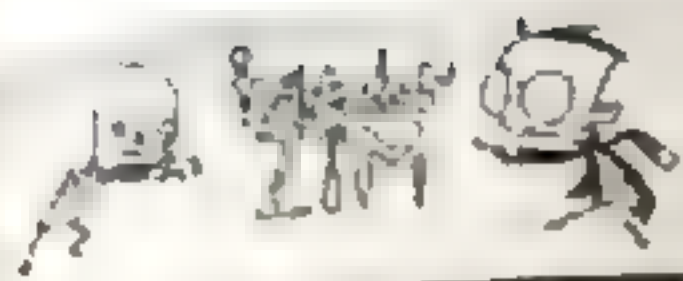
DIALOGUE ② ... TONIGHTS ...



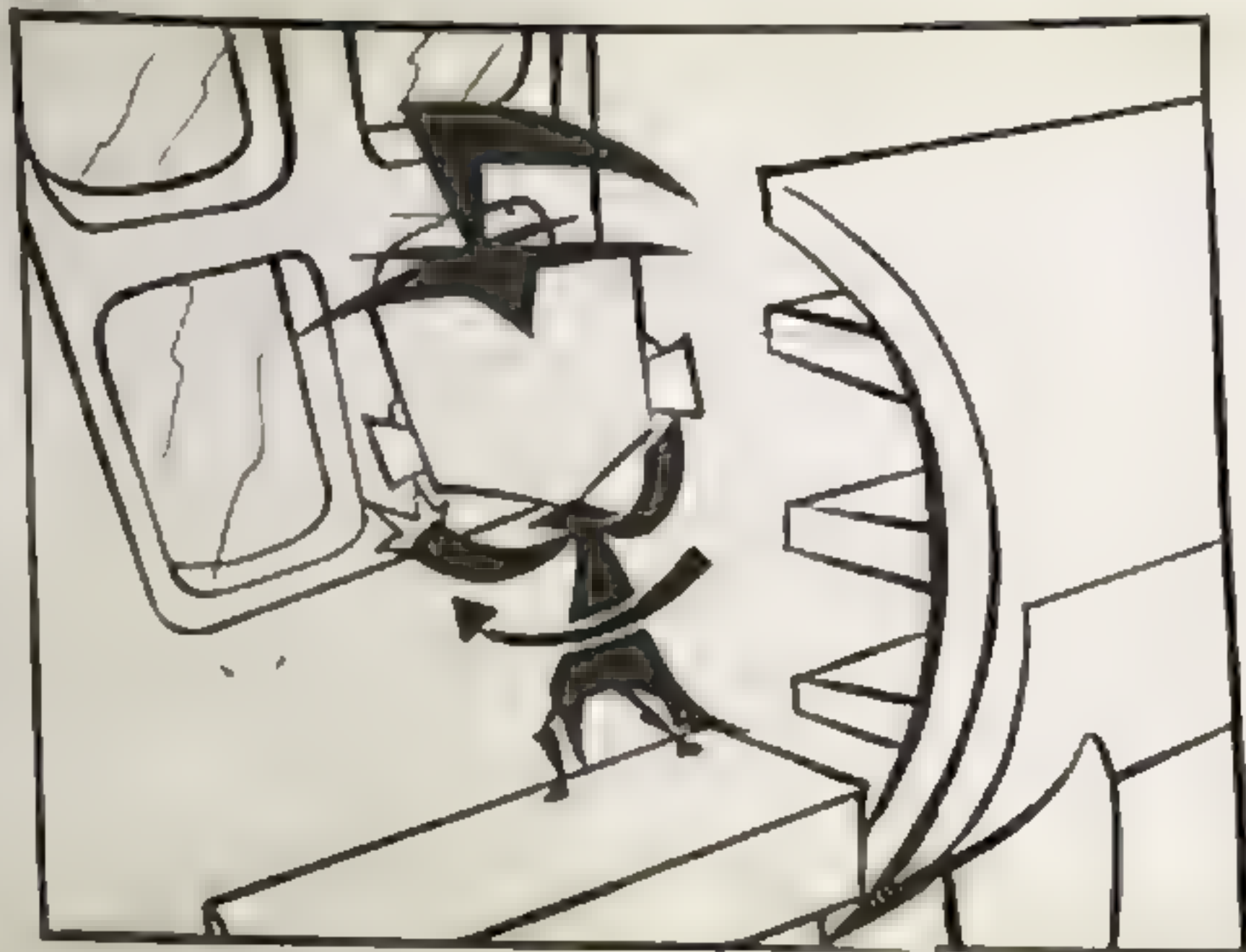
DIB FINALLY SETTLES ON LEDGE  
INSIDE OF MACHIV'S BEDROOM

DIALOGUE ③ ... MYSTERIOUS MYSTERIES MYST  
A DERUN ...





HE BEGINS TO TURN TO LOOK IN WINDOW  
 IF HE ④ I WOULDN'T EVEN BE HERE.



HE'S NOW COMPLETELY AROUND



GENERAL  
 PUNCHY

HE'S WHAT  
 LIKE WHEN HE  
 IS PUNCHY



DR. SPARKY  
 THE THINKER



REPORTER  
 GIRL

REPORTER  
 GIRL



THE BOSS  
 THE BOSS

This spread: "Invasion Poochy" character  
 designs above: the General, Dr. Sparky, Laser

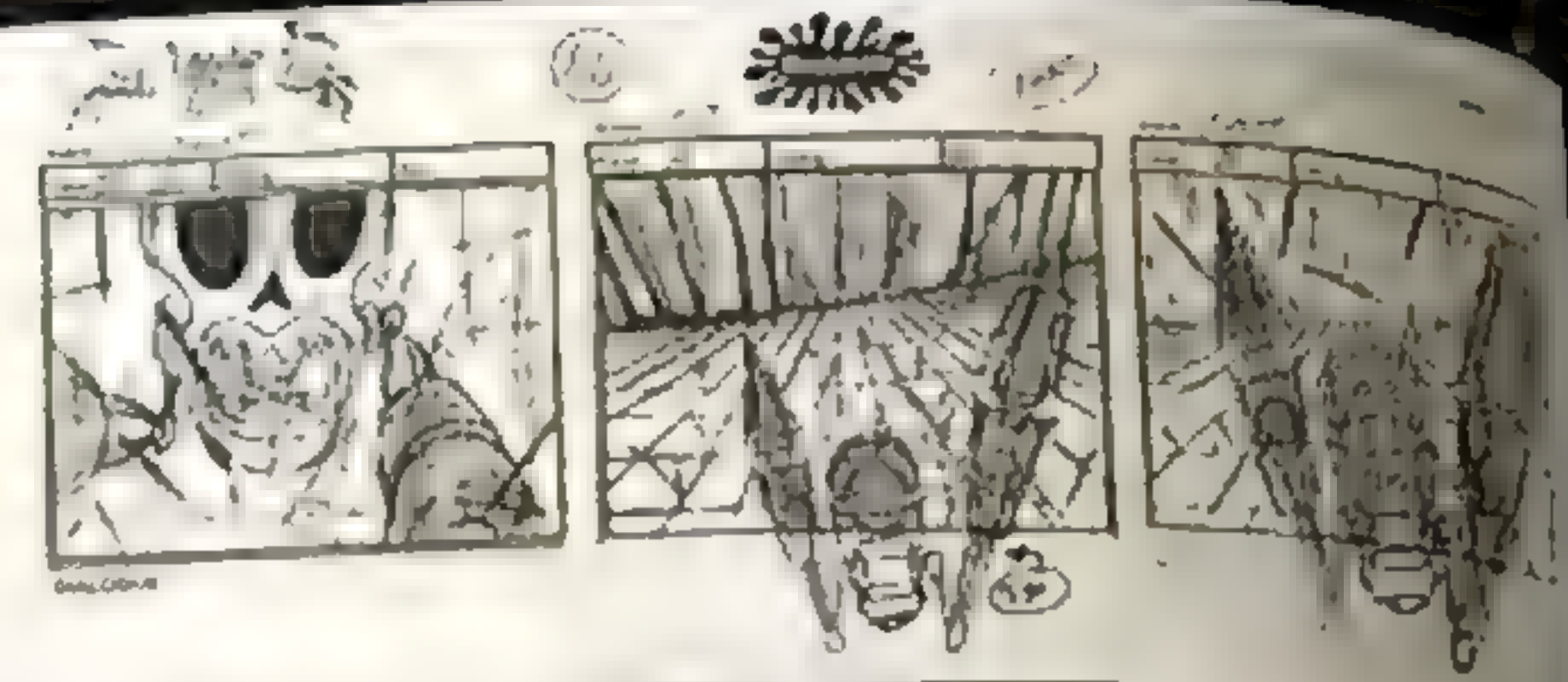
Specialist, Ted Blunchy, Reporter-Style, and  
 Real Girl.





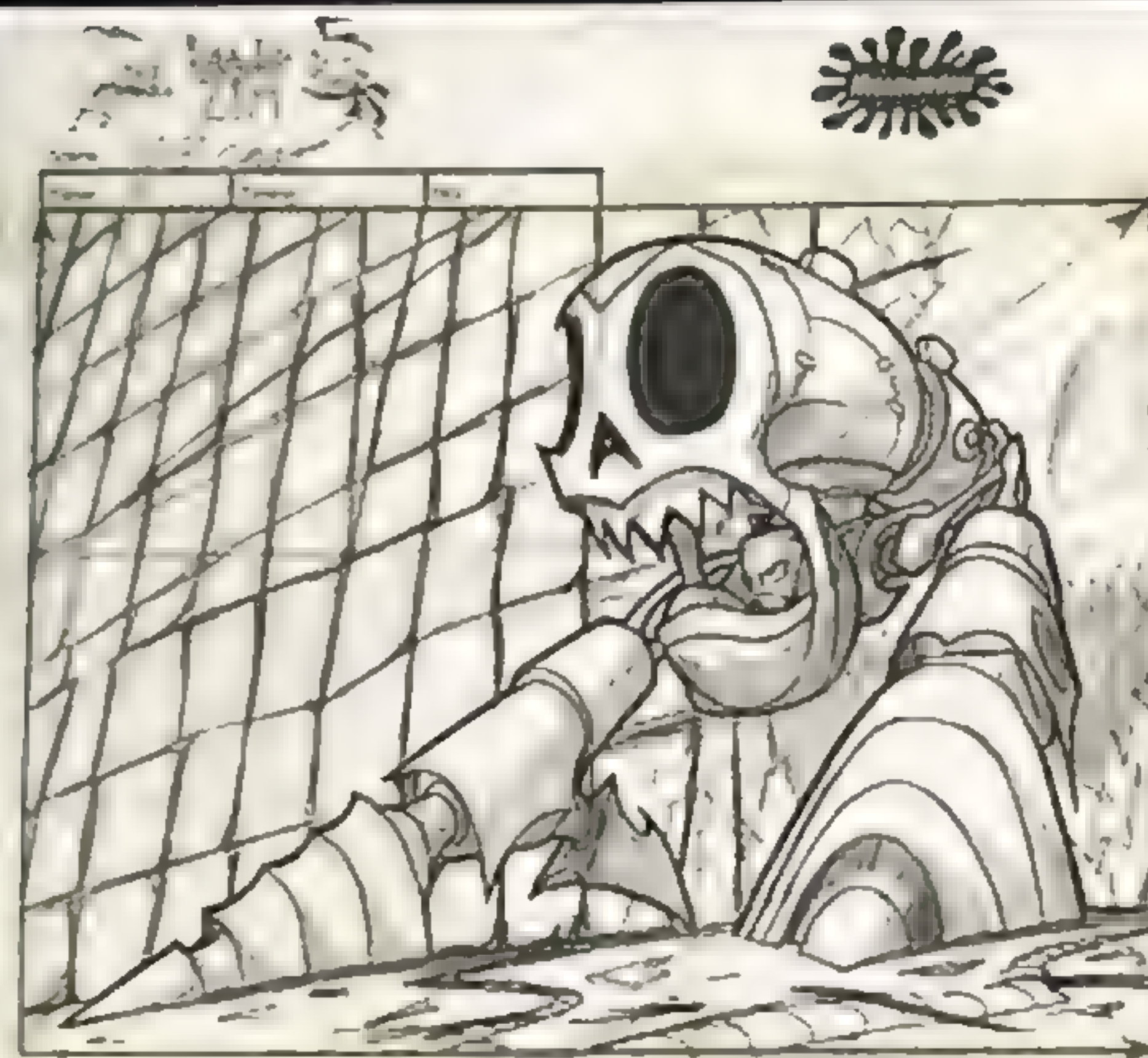
SEX CRASH THROUGH GLASS!!

- TIME THIS PANEL SIMILAR TO OUT PT DID 1 REACTION IN PANEL C
- SKELE-ROBOT, PILOTED BY HIM, CRASHES THROUGH WINDOW



EXTREME CLOSE

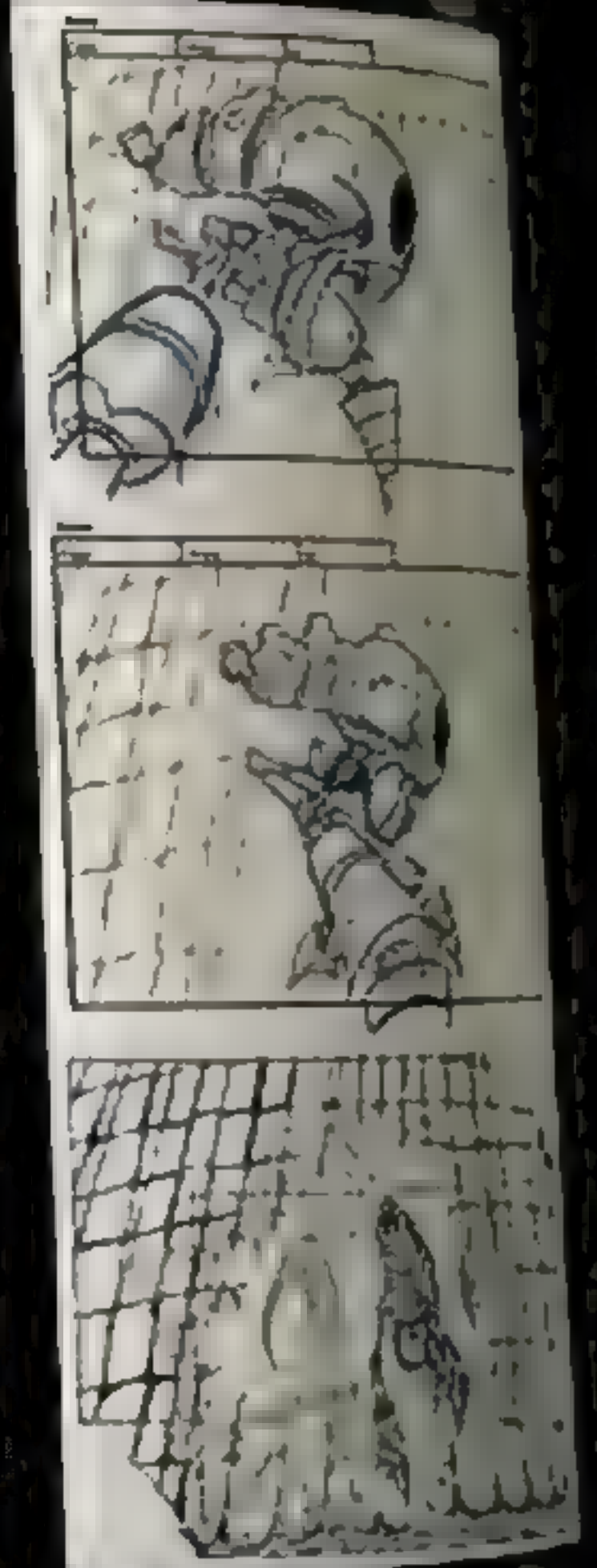
- QUICK SHOT OF SKELE-ROBOT SAIDING OUT GLASS AND DEBRIS FALLING



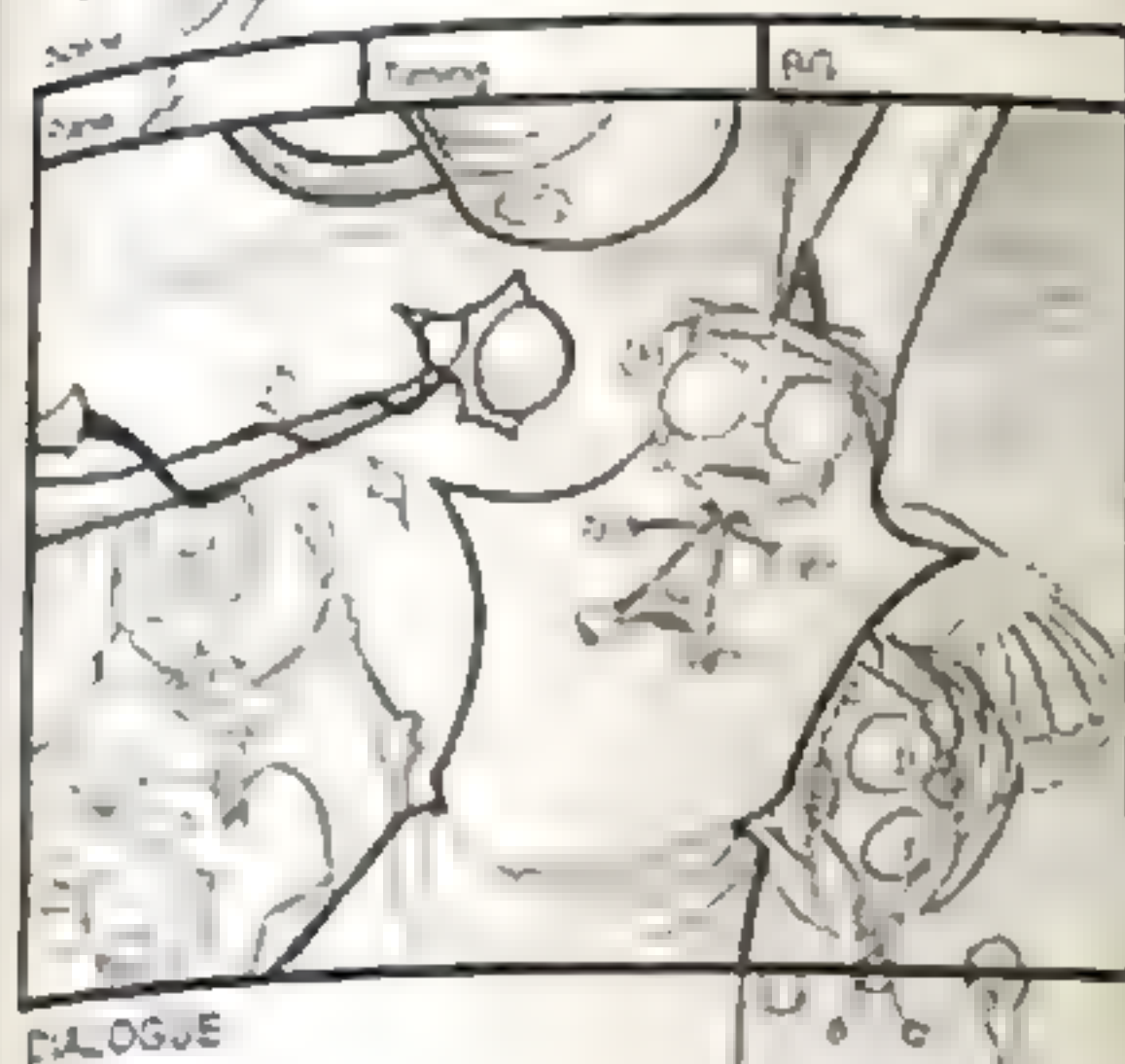
6X TRUCK OUT!!

REVEAL ENTIRE SKELE-ROBOT, ZIM IN COCKPIT

DIALOGUE

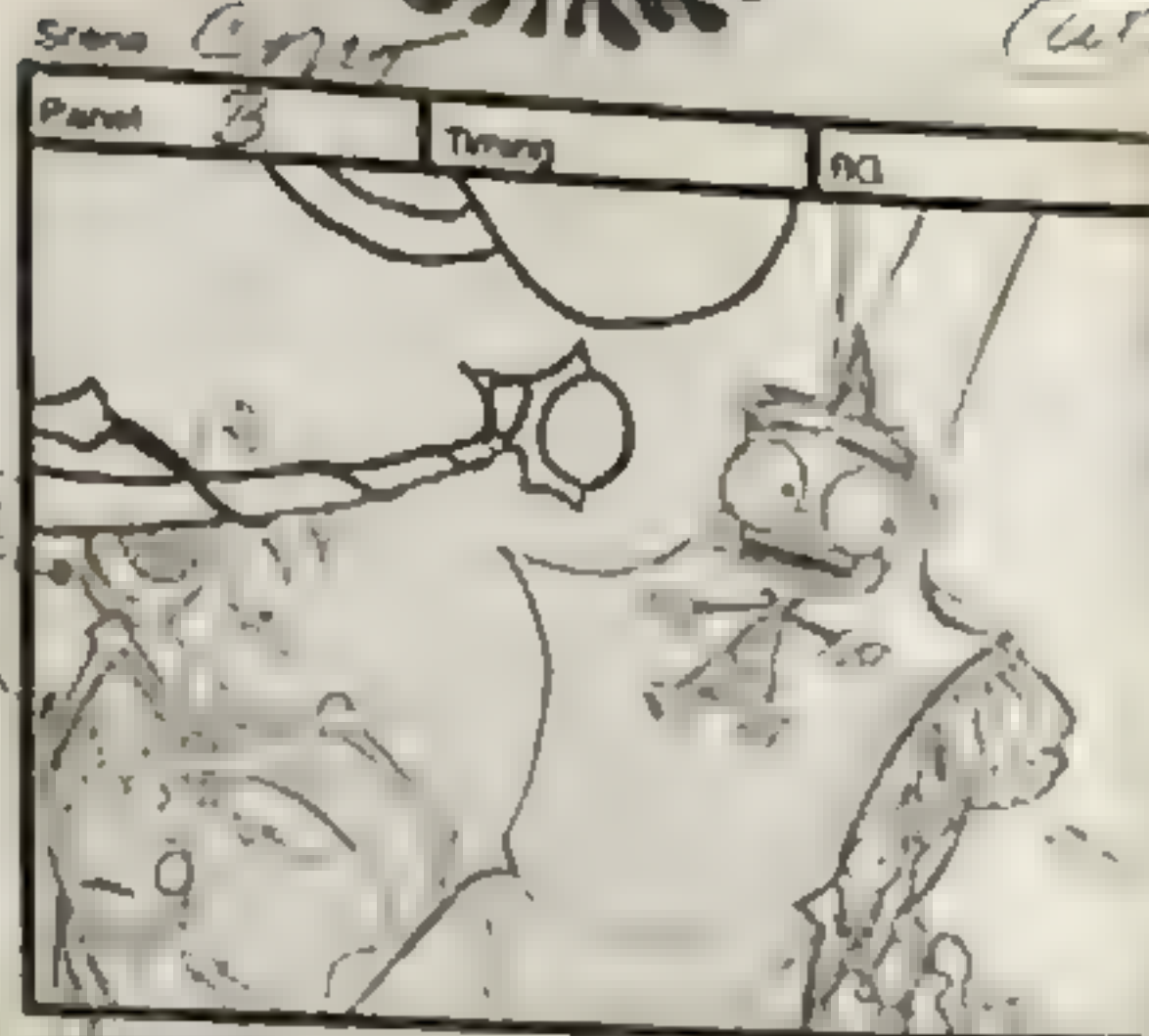






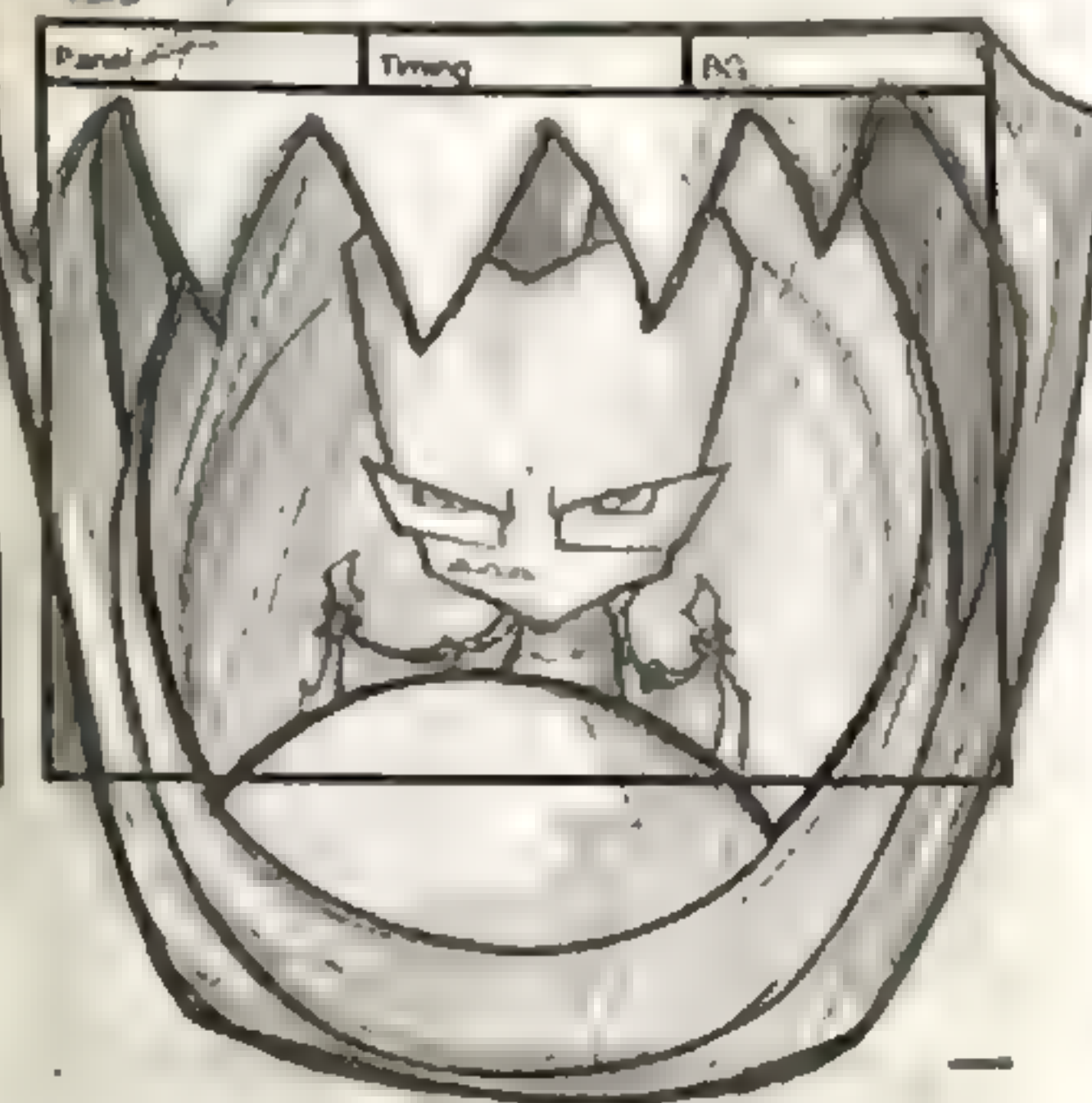
DIALOGUE

SP's



DIALOGUE

21



Panel 105

Timing

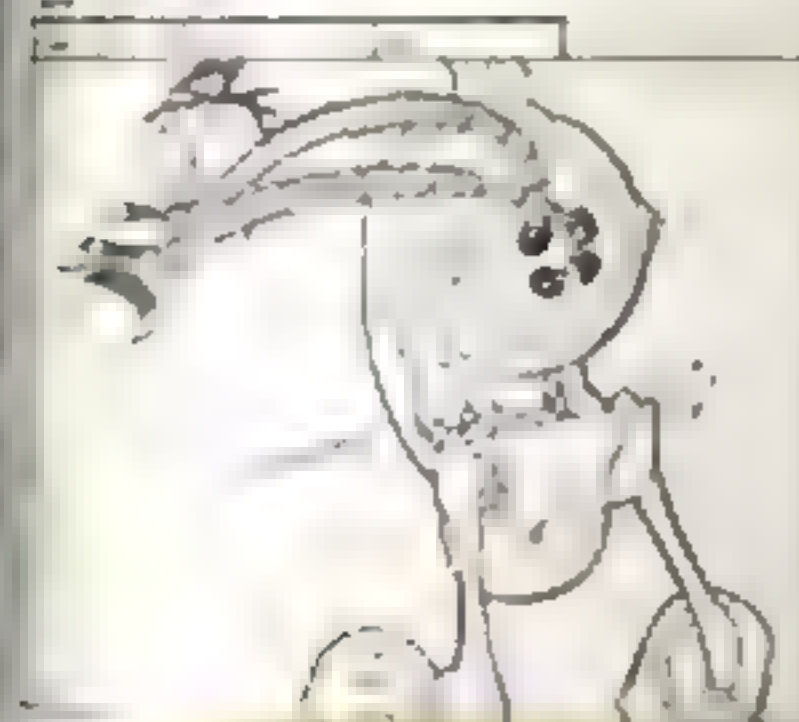
RG

- MONSTERS RECOIL

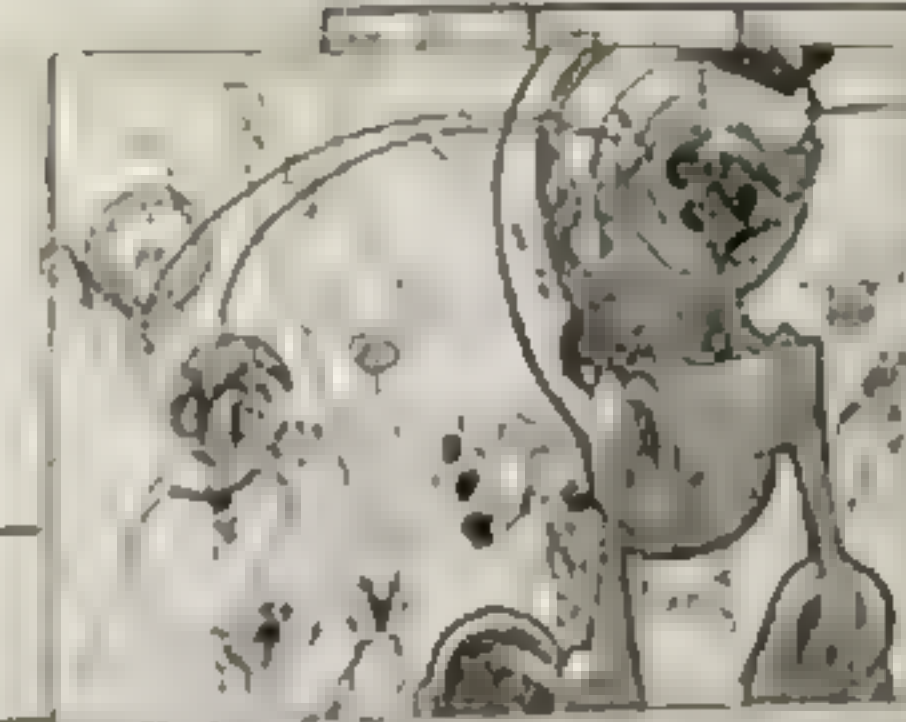
- DID'S EXPRESSION CHANGES FROM HORROR TO ECSTASY IN A BLINK

DID V J

1/2



DIALOGUE



DIALOGUE

MONSTERS (SARON COM D)

REVISED



- FOUR TENTACLES WHIP AROUND DID'S HEAD

- FOUR OTHER TENTACLES (WHICH WERE) QUICKLY EXTEND OUT FROM SIDES OF SKELE HEAD



DIALOGUE

2:00 10 DON'T HOLD

This spread: "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom" (EP14) storyboard panels showing complete horror technology in action.

Overleaf: a bombing away of stils from the episode











# BACKGROUNDS

The background designers on *Zim* were required to be inventive and efficient while executing at a high technical level on paper.

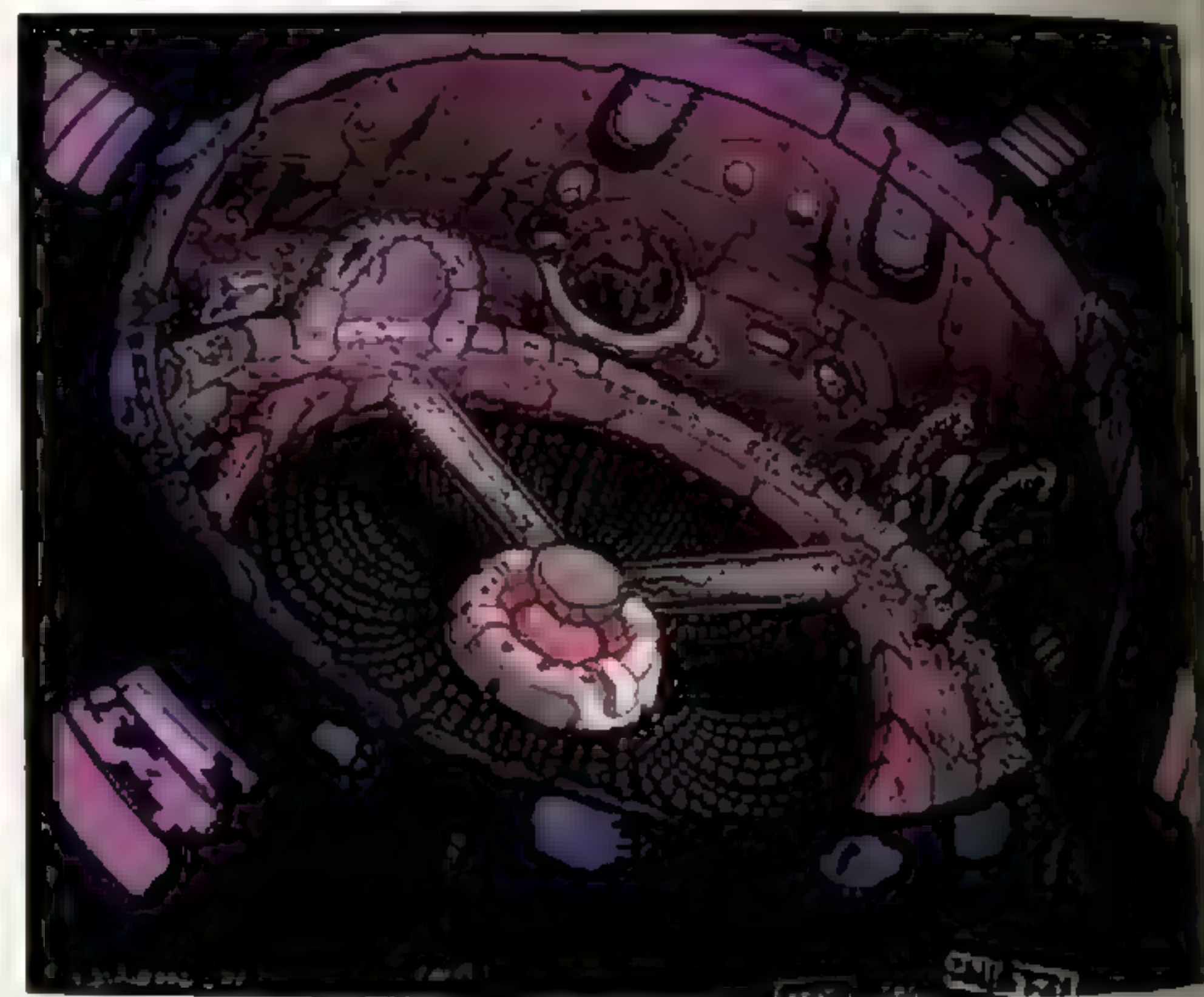
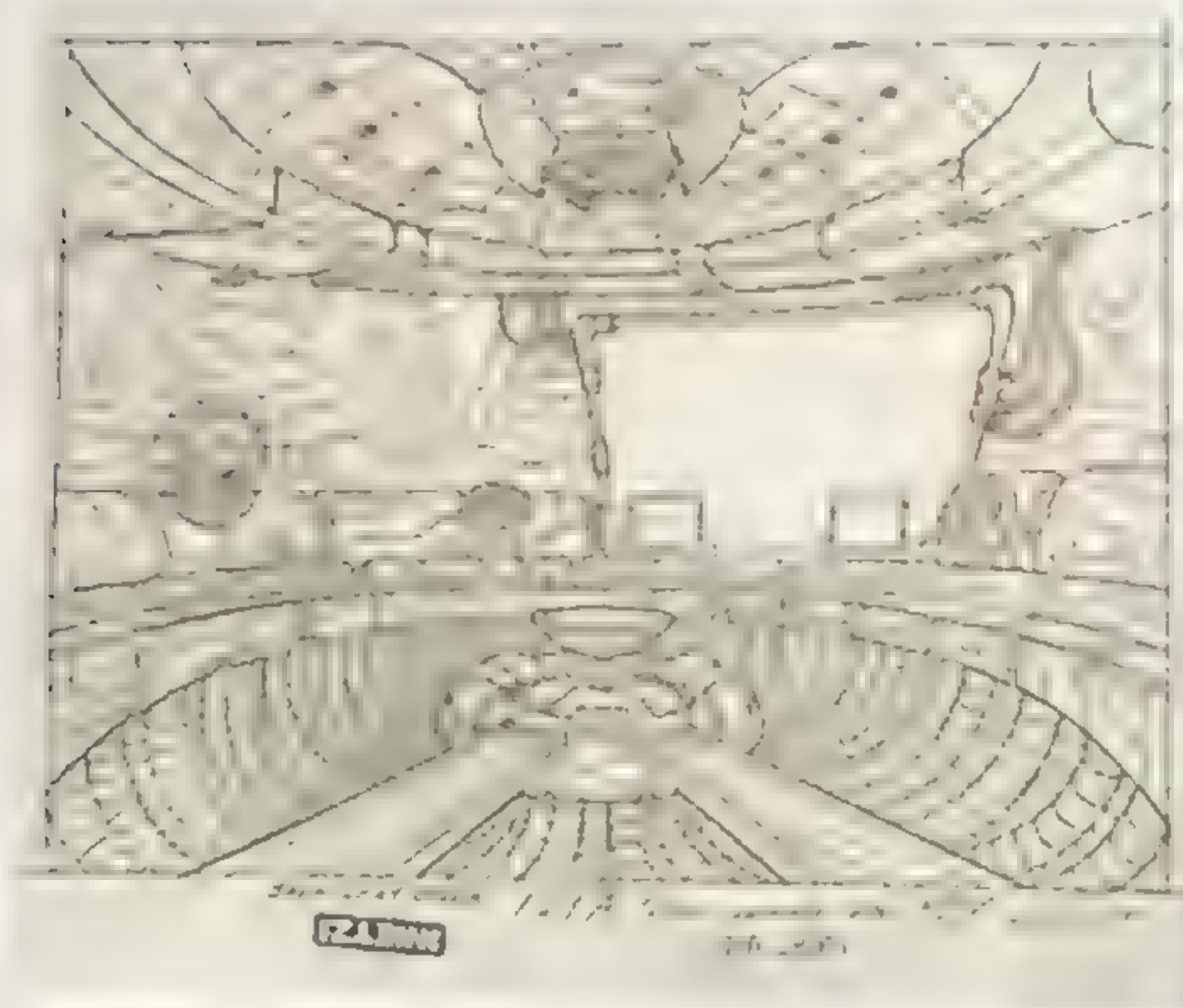
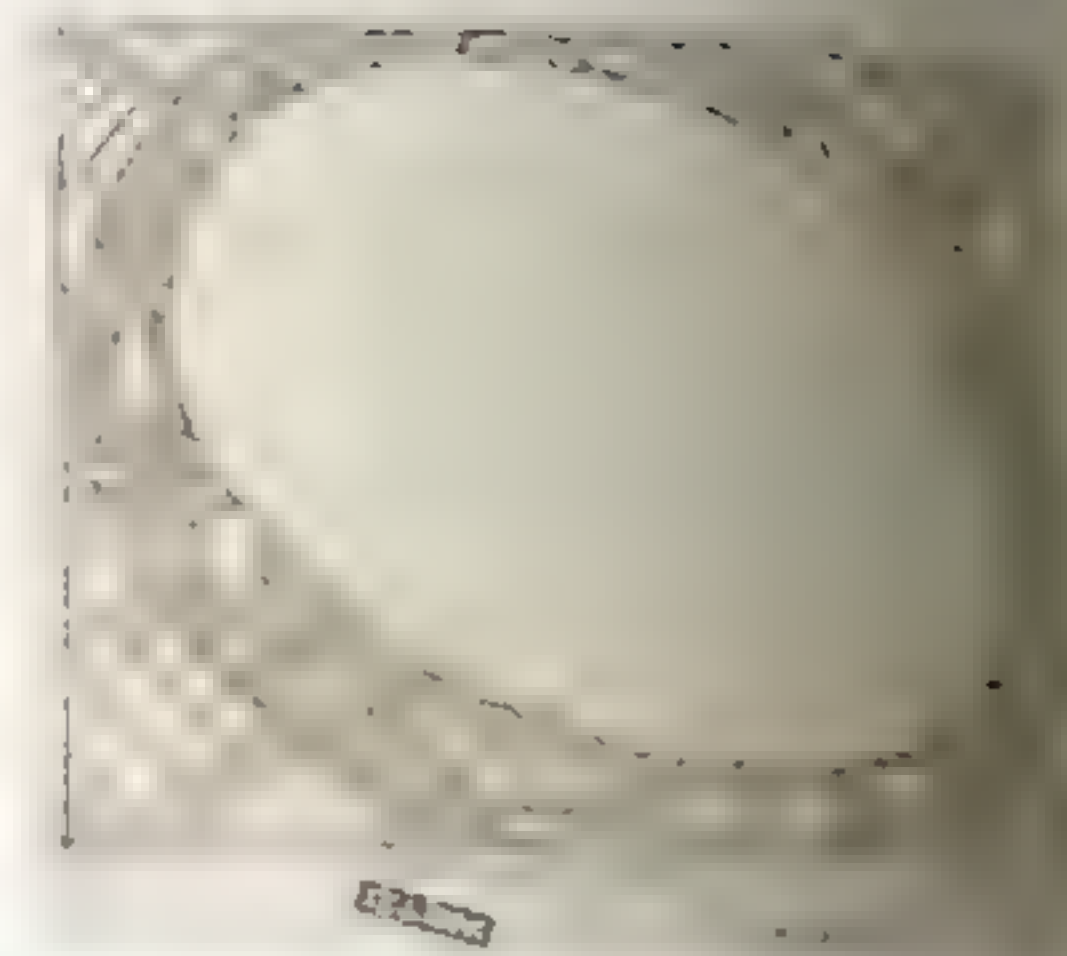
**Spencer G. Davis (background designer):** We found the style after a time by exploring how to make it feel like alien technology existing in our current world. One thing we did a heck of a lot of was tubing. There was tubing going everywhere. We got really good at drawing pipes and tubing and stuff that was organic.

**Jairo Lizarazu (background designer):** This was prior to computers in the process when we would

still walk around the studio with our easels, guides and S-curves. With the tubes and openings I always felt that there was a real arachnid sense, or insect-like honeycomb of tubes and shafts that would take you into a place.

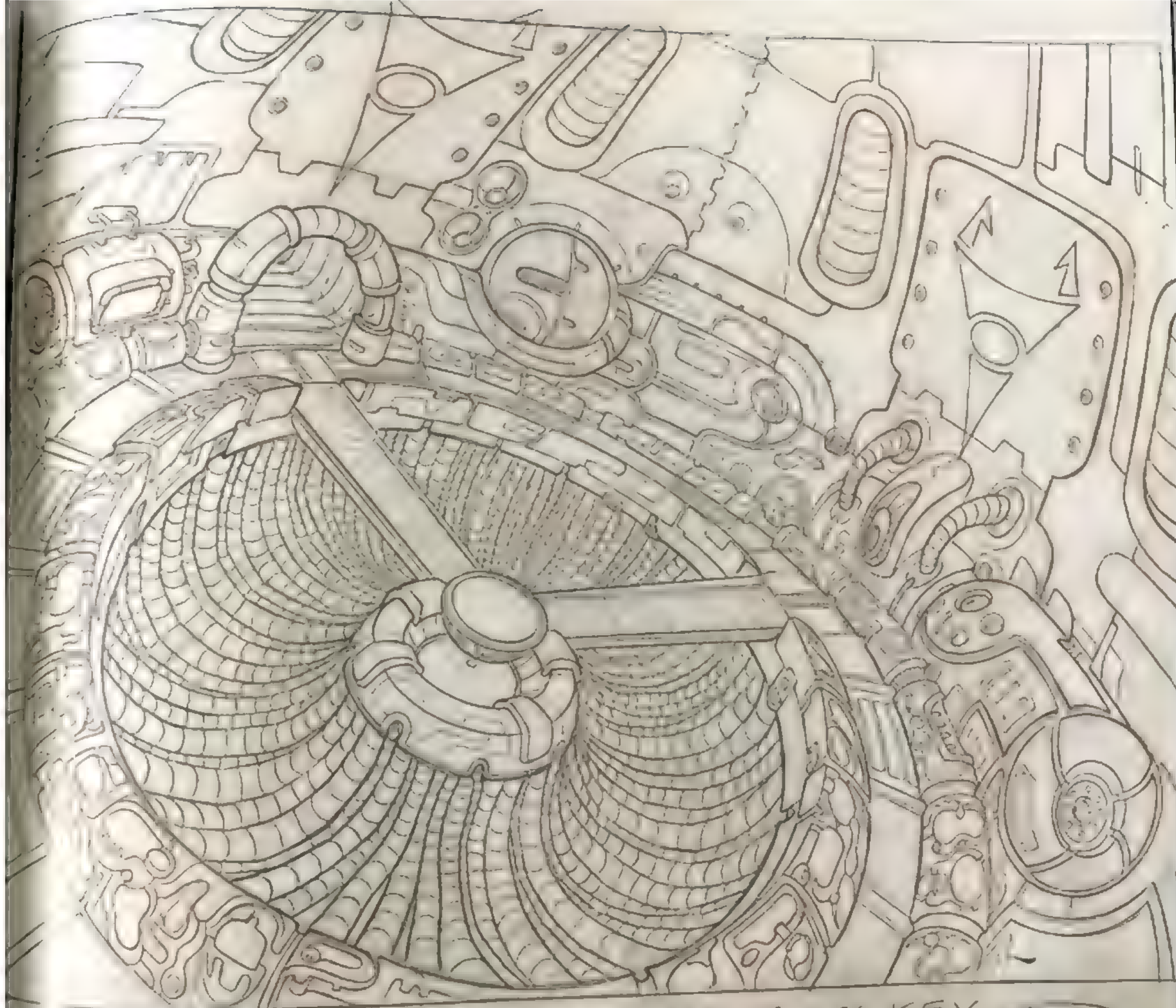
**Spencer:** It was modular too. There were forms that looked like you could pull them apart and wrap them around and put them together the other way. I picked up a lot of that from Jairo.

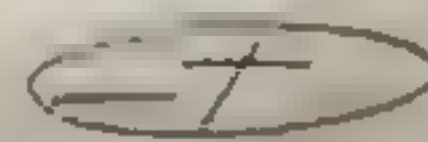
**Jairo:** And that what was so cool, we each had our own fortes, and when we got together, looking around we picked stuff up off each other.



This spread: Layout drawings by Spencer G. Davis from the episode "Beyond the Stars" (EP21)



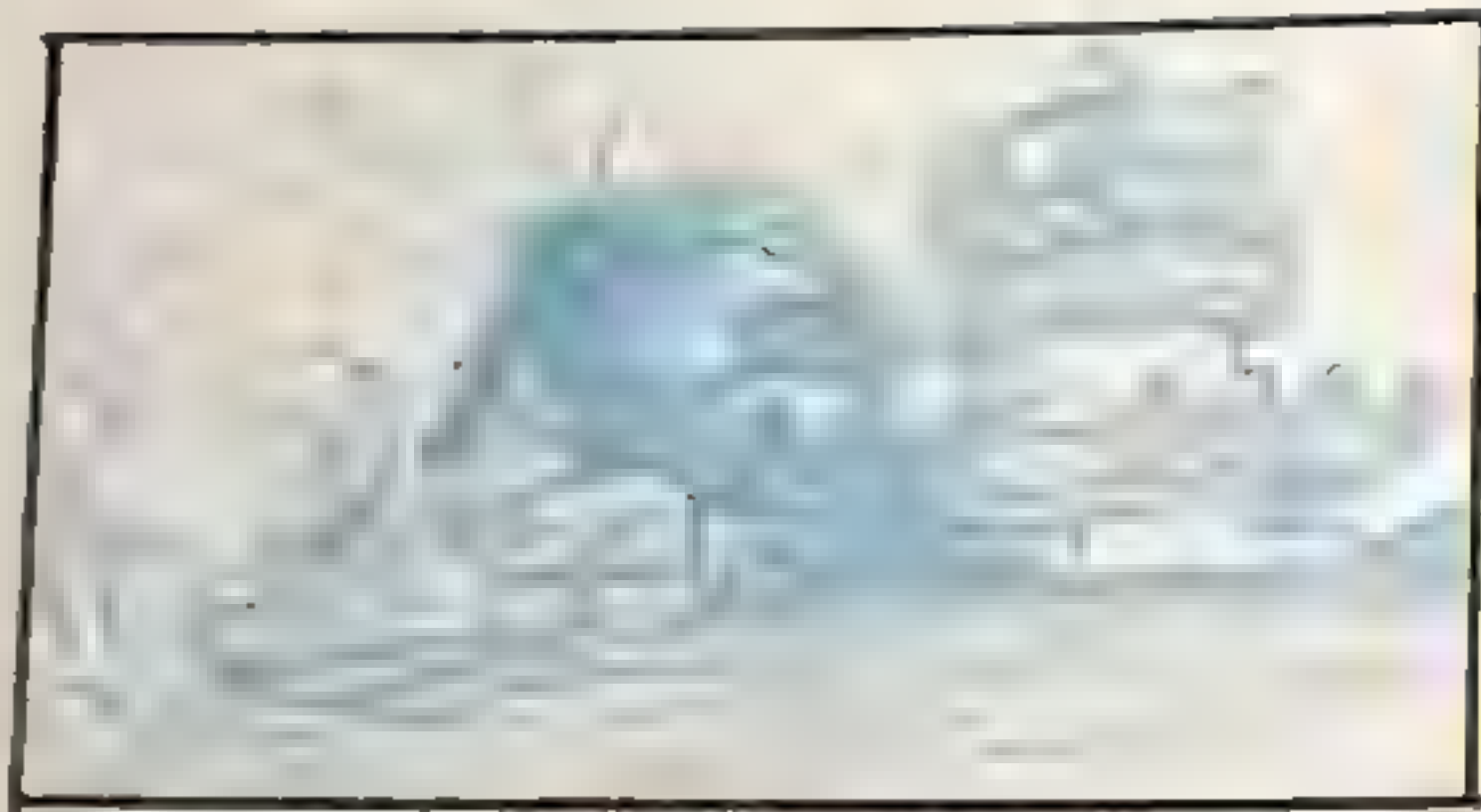


BACK SEAT DRIVER 121A SCZEG KEY 

INLETZ

121A\_B002\_01





Local Tiba  
 Local are  
 new from facing  
 coming out to a  
 new view  
 Tiba tags on  
 path  
 FAILED ON TO  
 ST-ARTIST

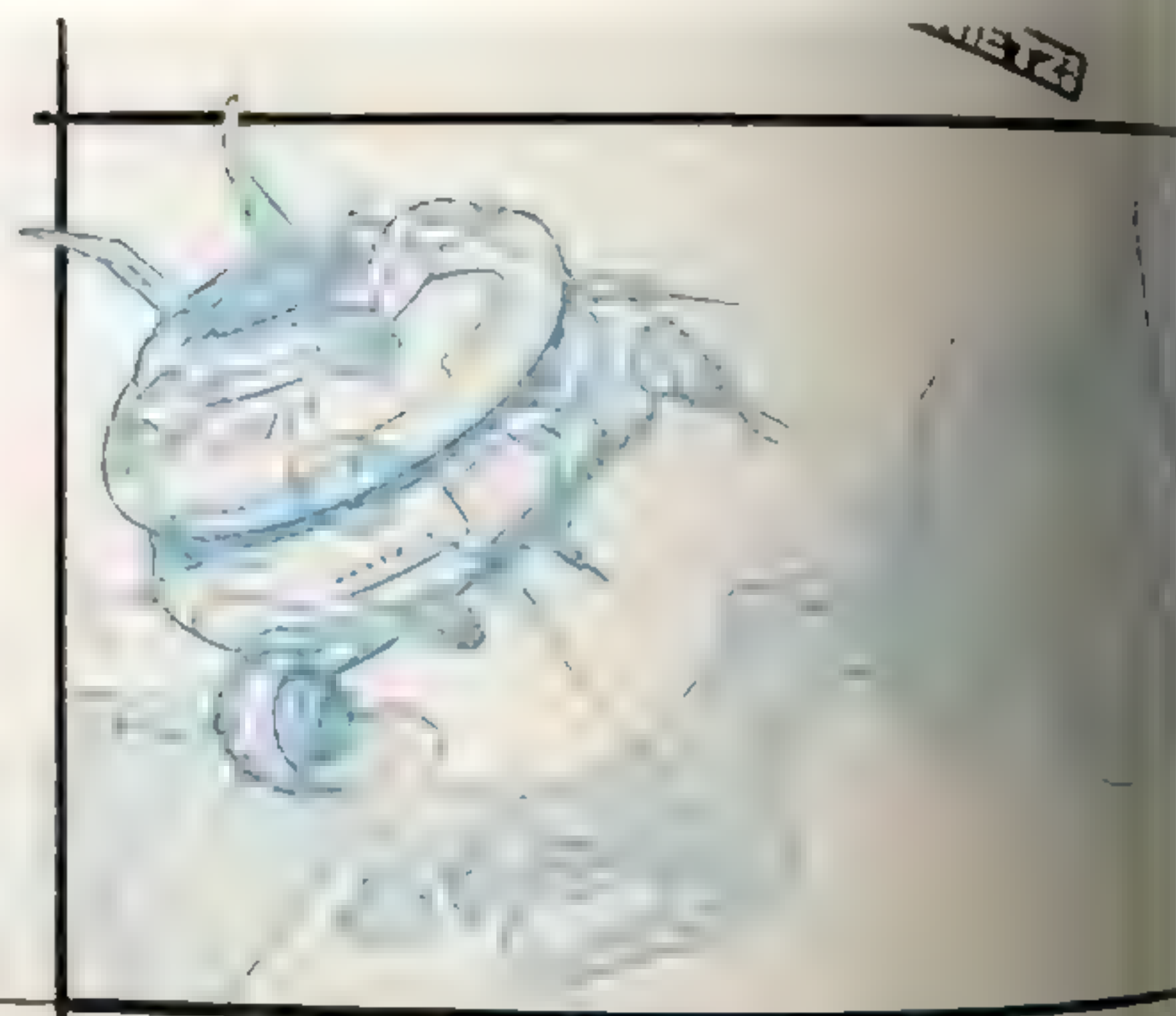
At the mountain. Ext. High. Tiba. PEA



TAKING HORRORS NEW GIRL EXT. HIGH TIB TIB CENTER  
 GROUND.



At the mountain. (Ext. High. Tiba) ZIAB ZARWID



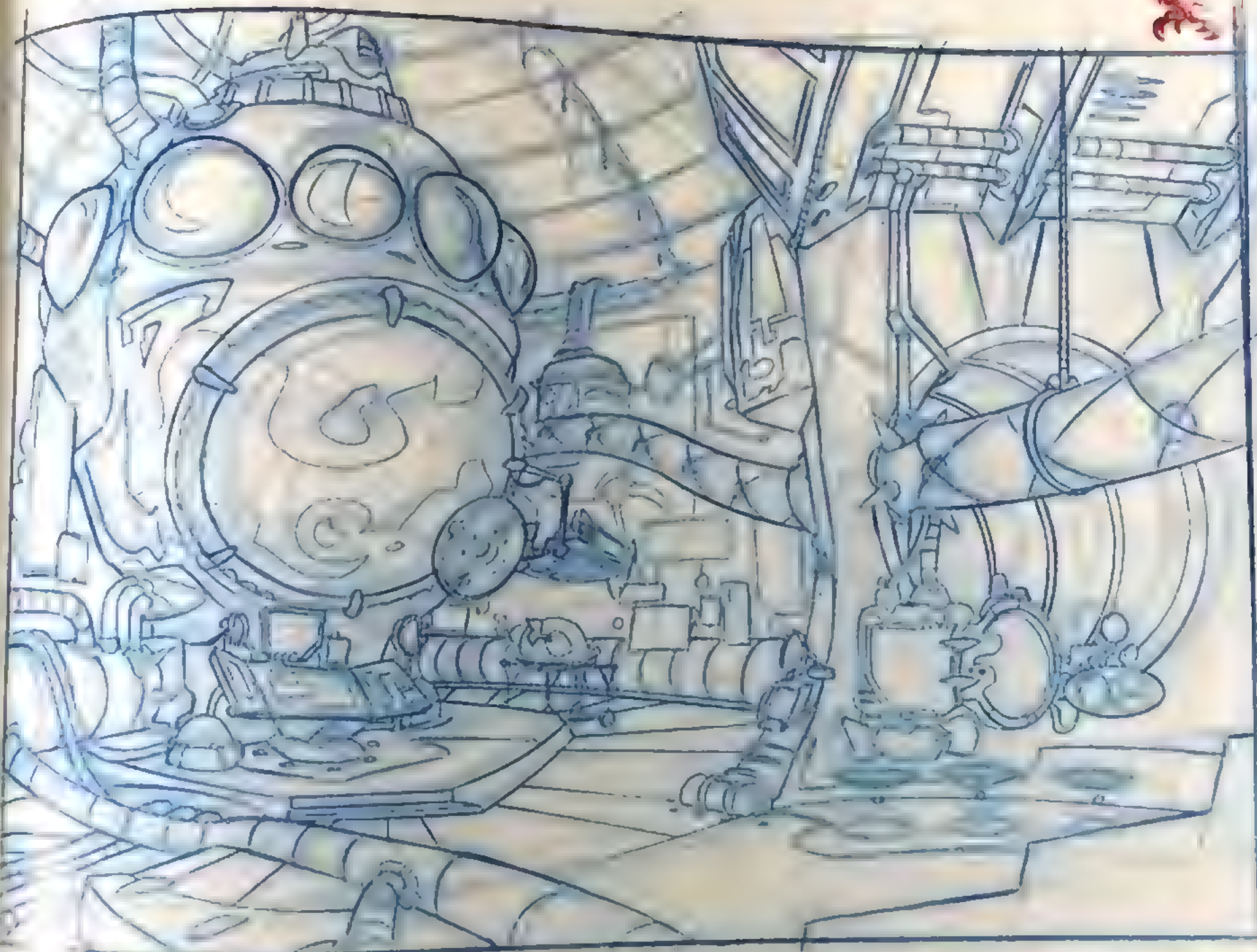
TIB TIBAL TIB TIBAL



# BACKGROUND THUMBNAILS



cleaning this key B6.



12/10/01  
12/10/01

12/10/01

12/10/01

This spread: Fairly complex "thumbnail" drawings were created by background designers to get approval for the location design, and then

to distribute to both the board artist teams who were drawing characters in the locations, and to background artists to finish as key background

art layouts. Another way to describe such precise thumbnails in the studio vernacular: "done-rolls." Art by background designer Jairo Lizarazu.





need a robot in  
the space  
ship should be  
away in a  
a small  
metal center  
cut looking  
Ment was gone

*[Signature]*



BACKGROUND THUMBNAILS





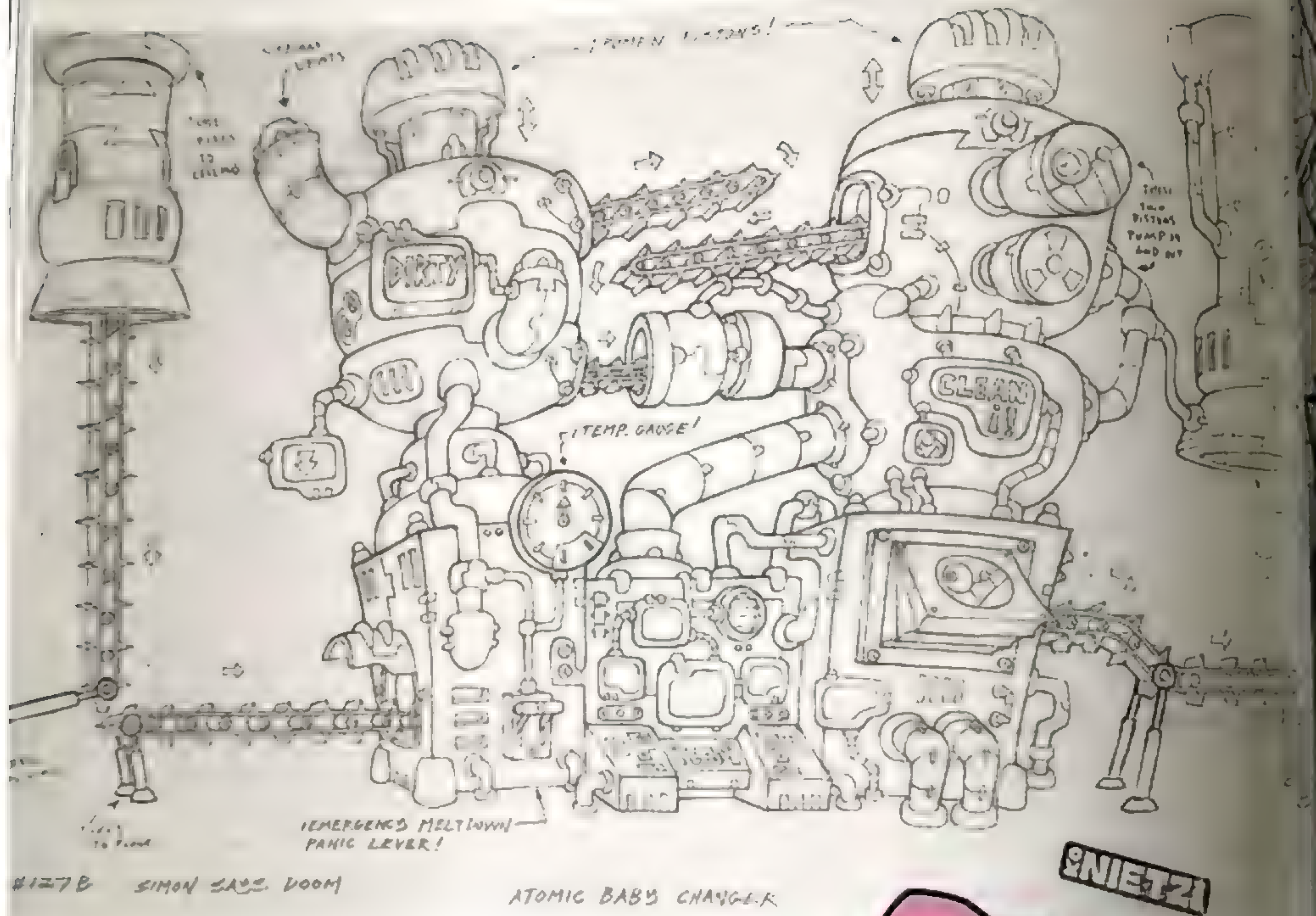
... layout of the Membrane's  
... made of it from the ep-  
... from Beyond the Stars"

(EP21). A sticky note with revision requests illus-  
trates the utility of only finishing a layout to this  
rough form before seeking approval. Background

artist Mauricio Morgan may have taken the saying  
"blood, sweat, and tears" literally, depending on  
the source for the brown smudge at the bottom.

**Above:** Sketched elevations, thumbnail, a layout,  
and colored backgrounds depicting the Membrane's  
garage, bottom right by Jairo Lizama.





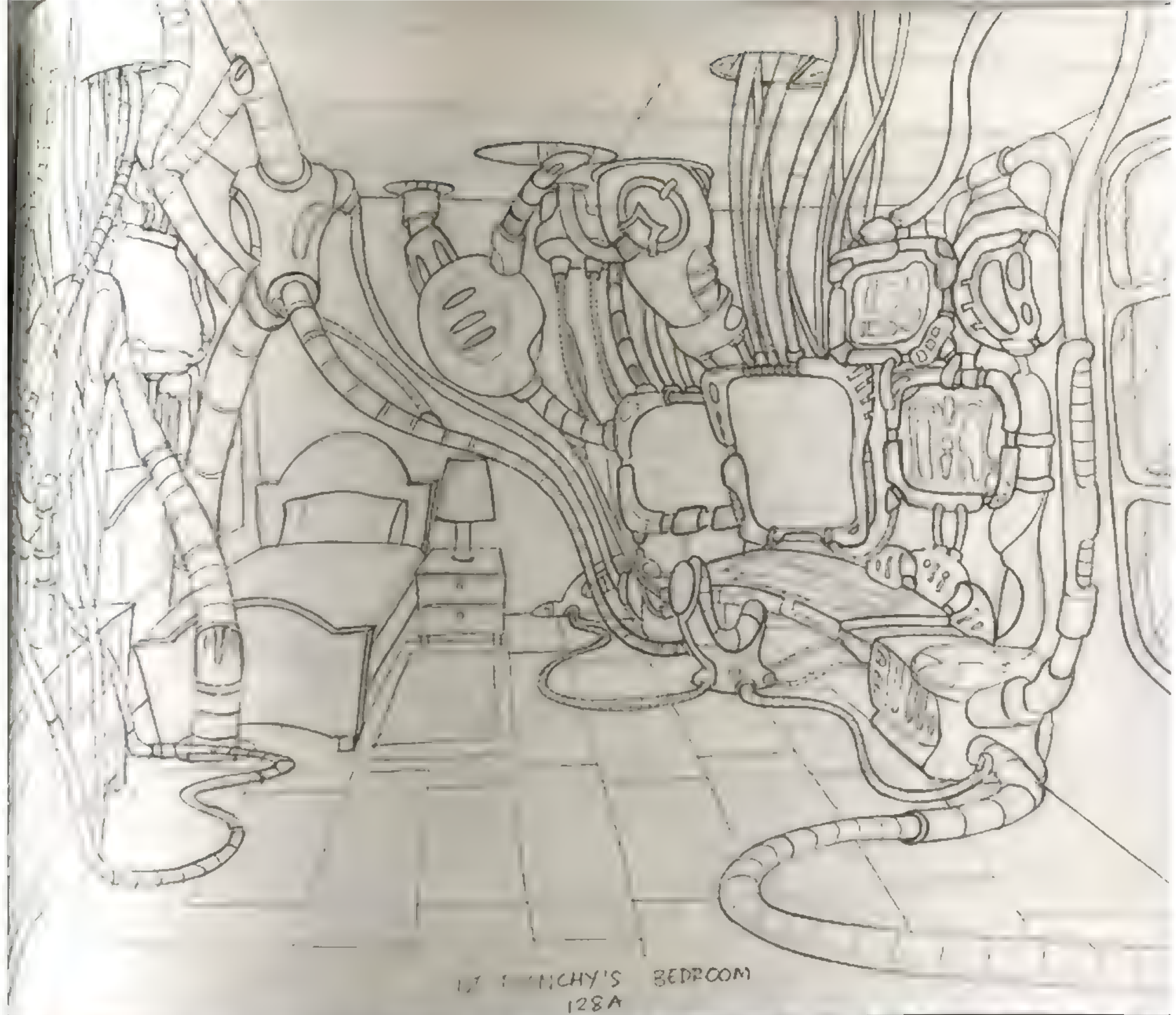
#127B SIMON SAYS DOOM

ATOMIC BABY CHANGER



BACKGROUND DESIGN

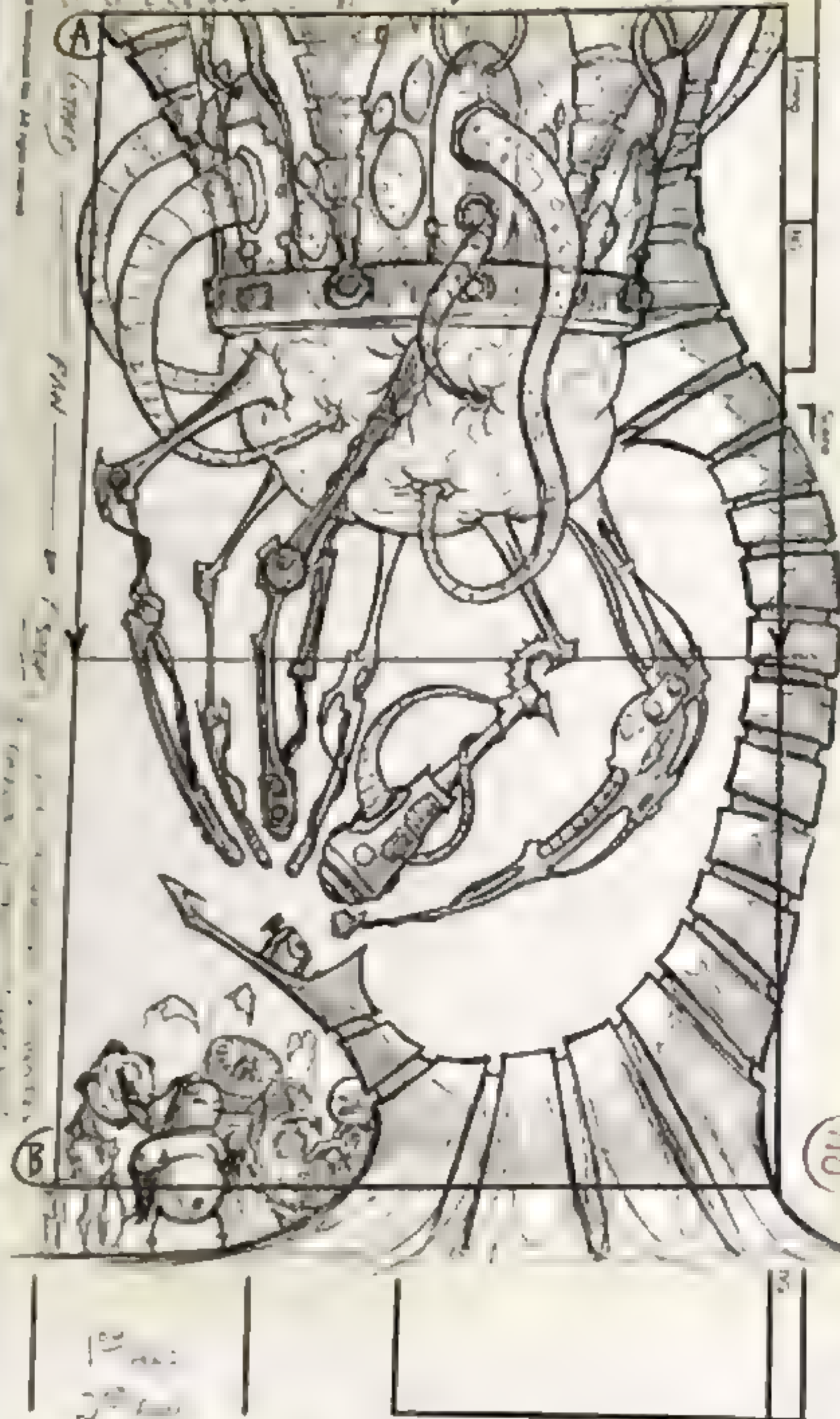




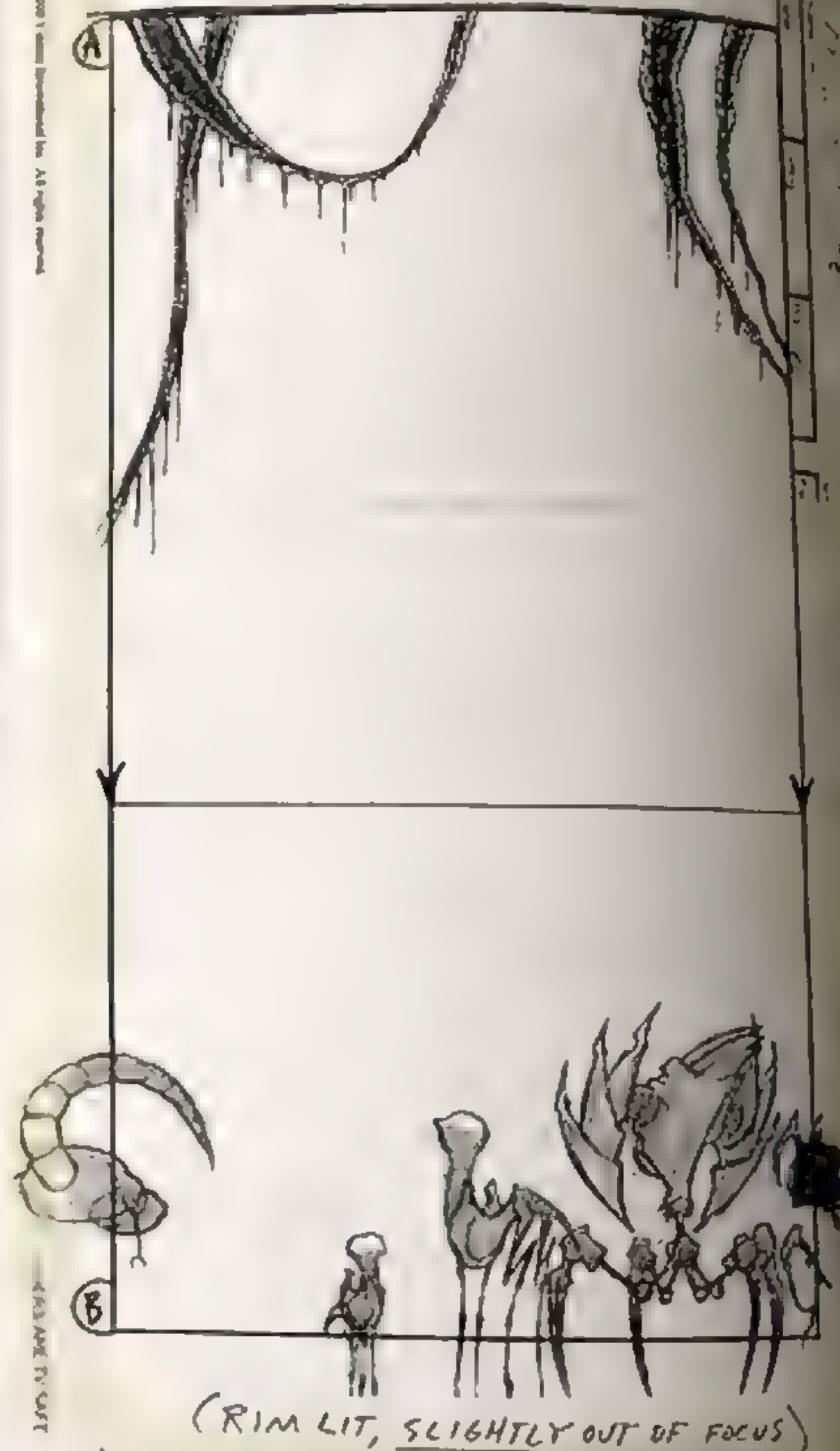
This spread: A prop design and layout drawing from the unfinished episode "Simon Says Doom."



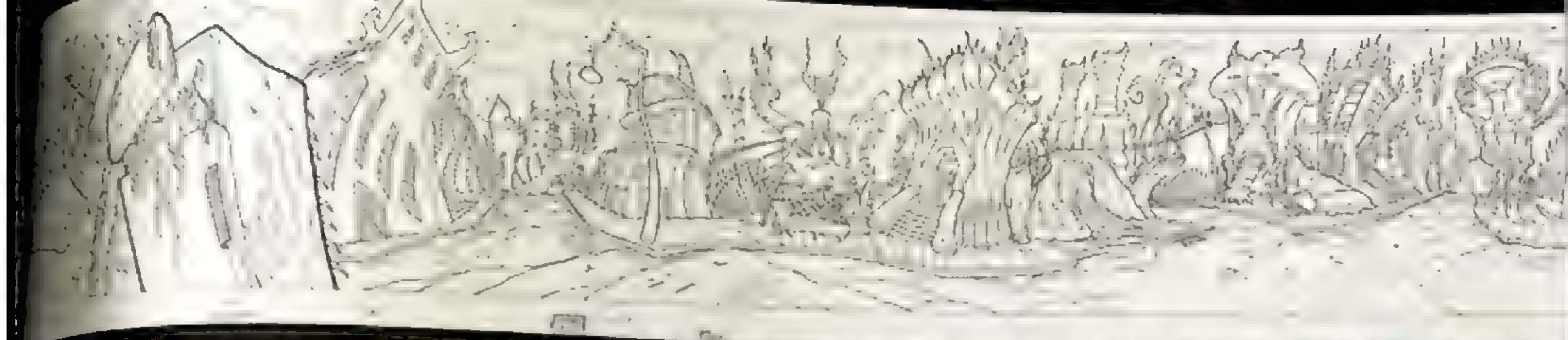
LAYER ②: THE LIVING MACHINE, ZIA, HUMMELFRESH,  
 RALFIE, ANCHAMSTER 2000, THE ENIGMA, OCULORD, ADMIRAL  
 (ALL IN FOCUS)



LAYER ③: FILTHY PIPES, MR. PINCHY, GORDON PETERSON,  
 GORDON PETERSON, INSECT-RELATED BEAST THING 4 2







EZ

E251

1.6A/8

HALLOWEEN

1.6A/8

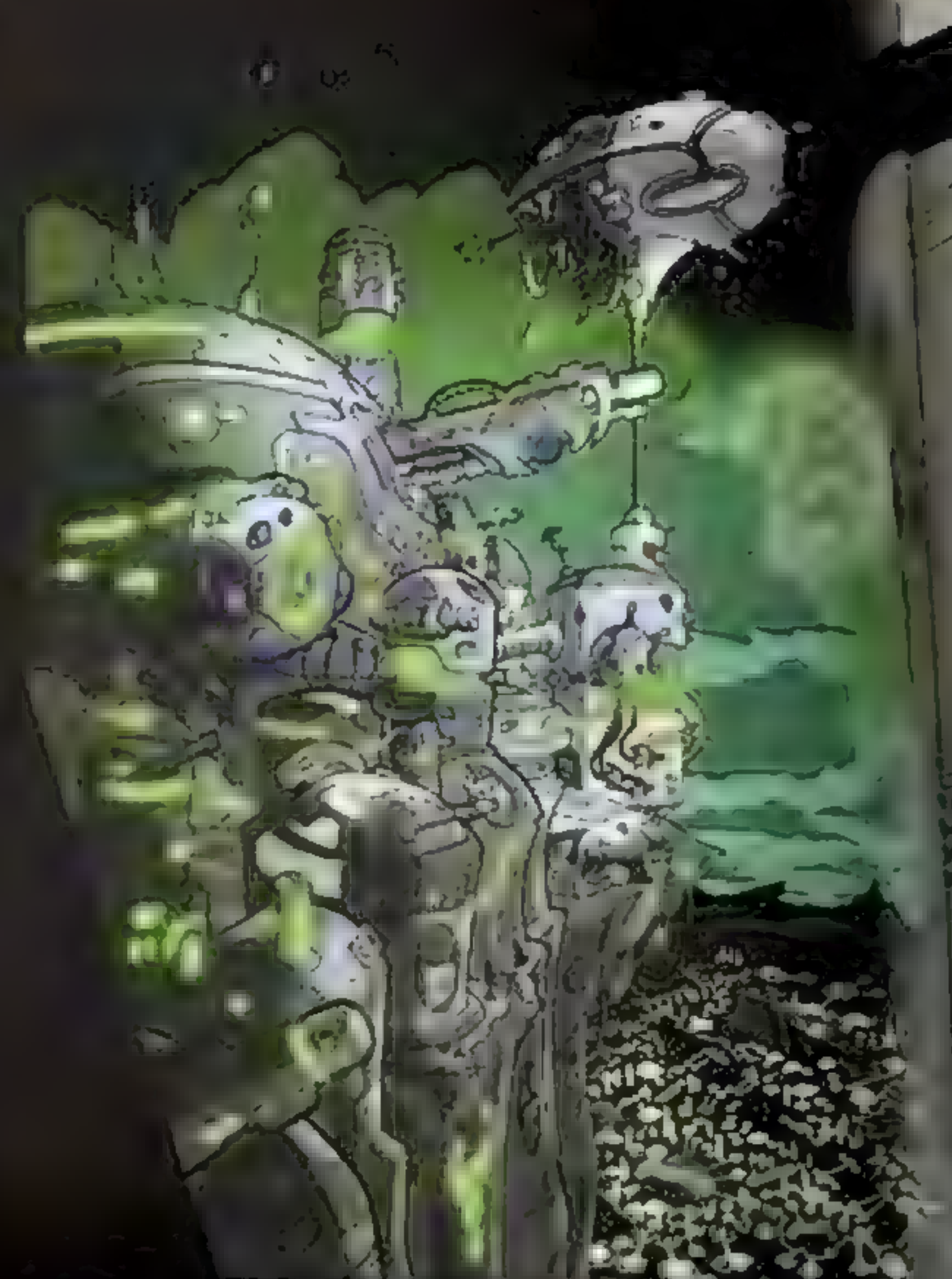
KEY

27

This spread: The horror element in Zim comes out strong in the "Halloween Spectacular of

Spooky Doom" (EP14) in these storyboard panels and layout drawings



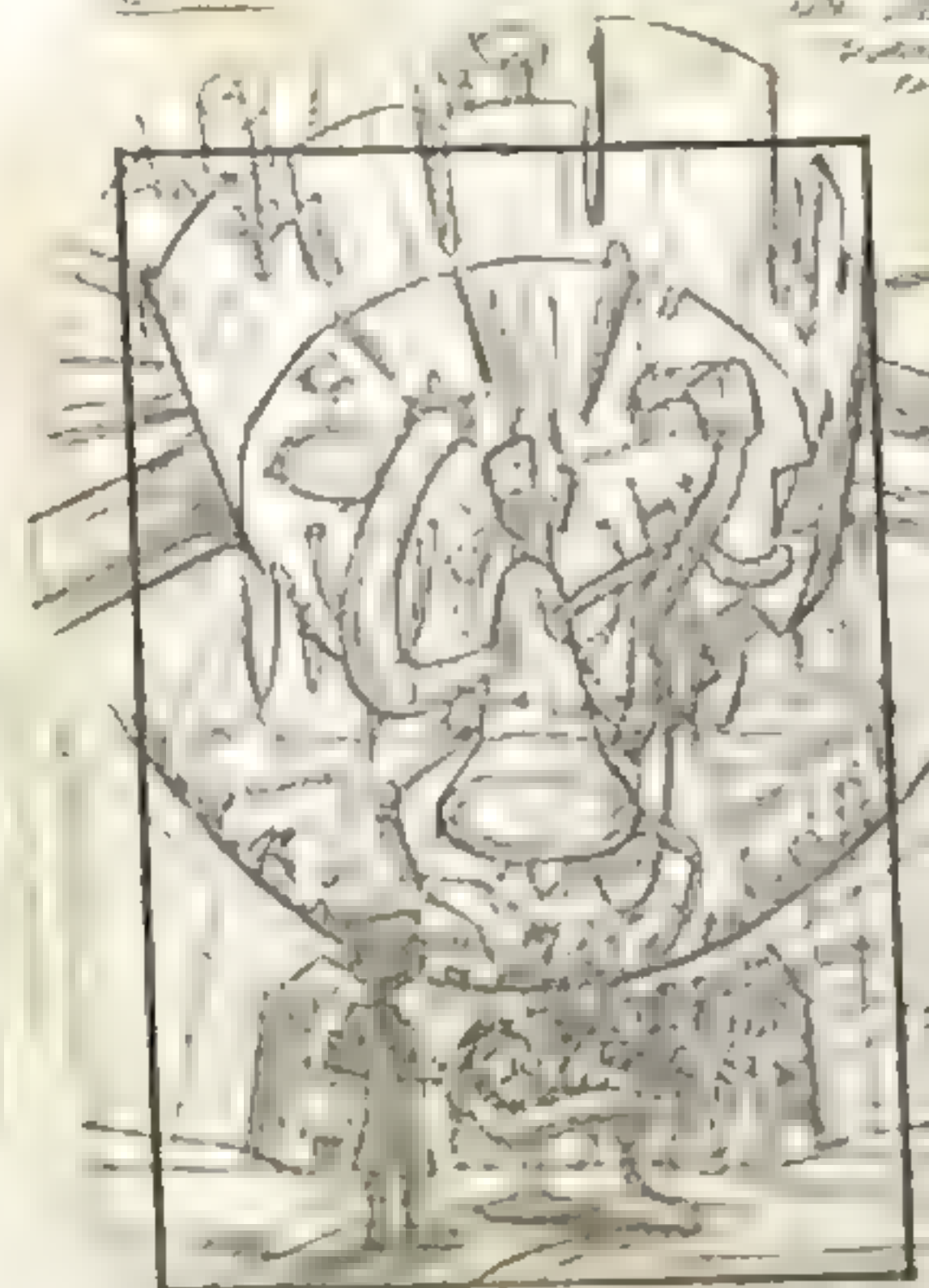
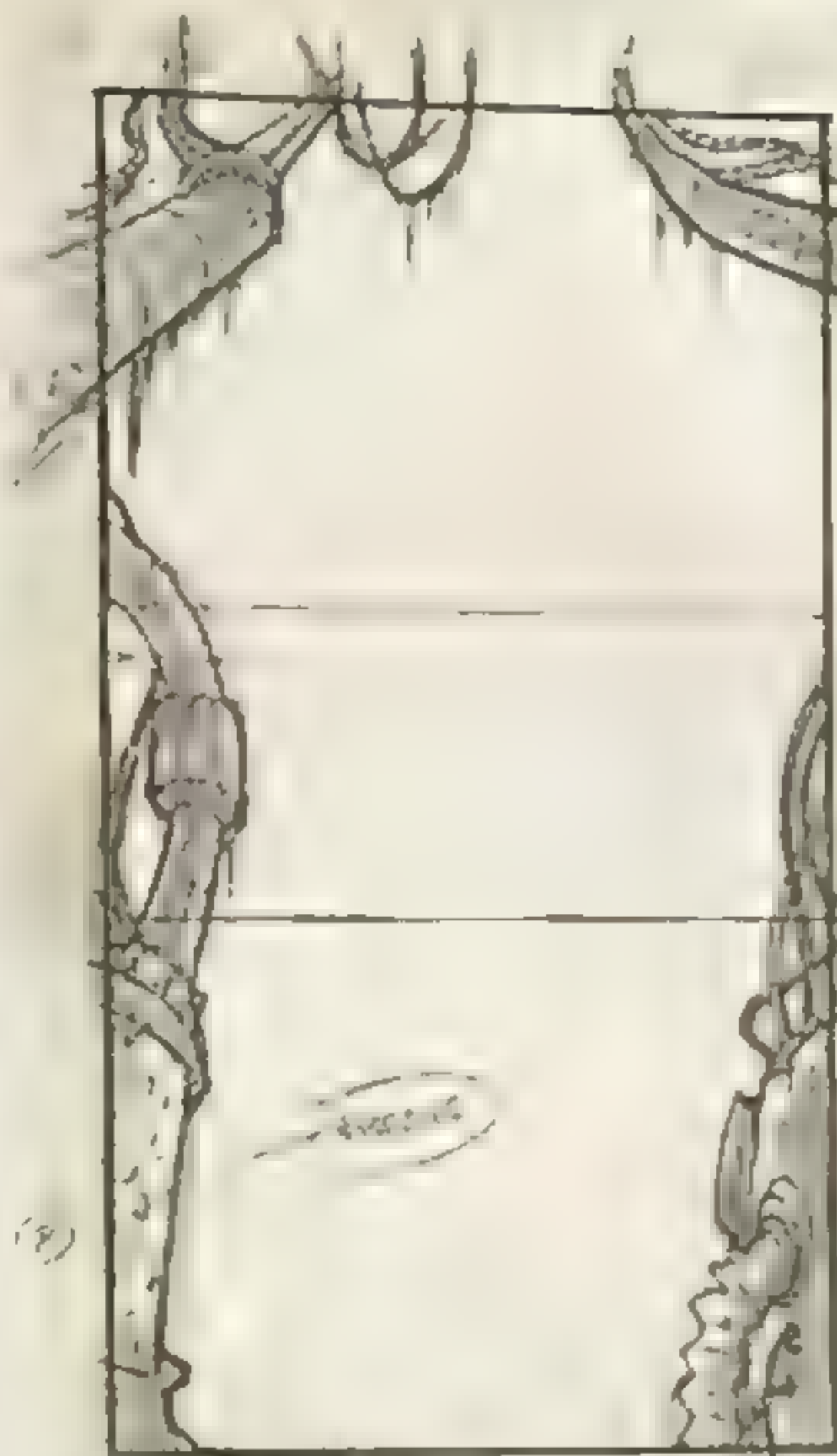
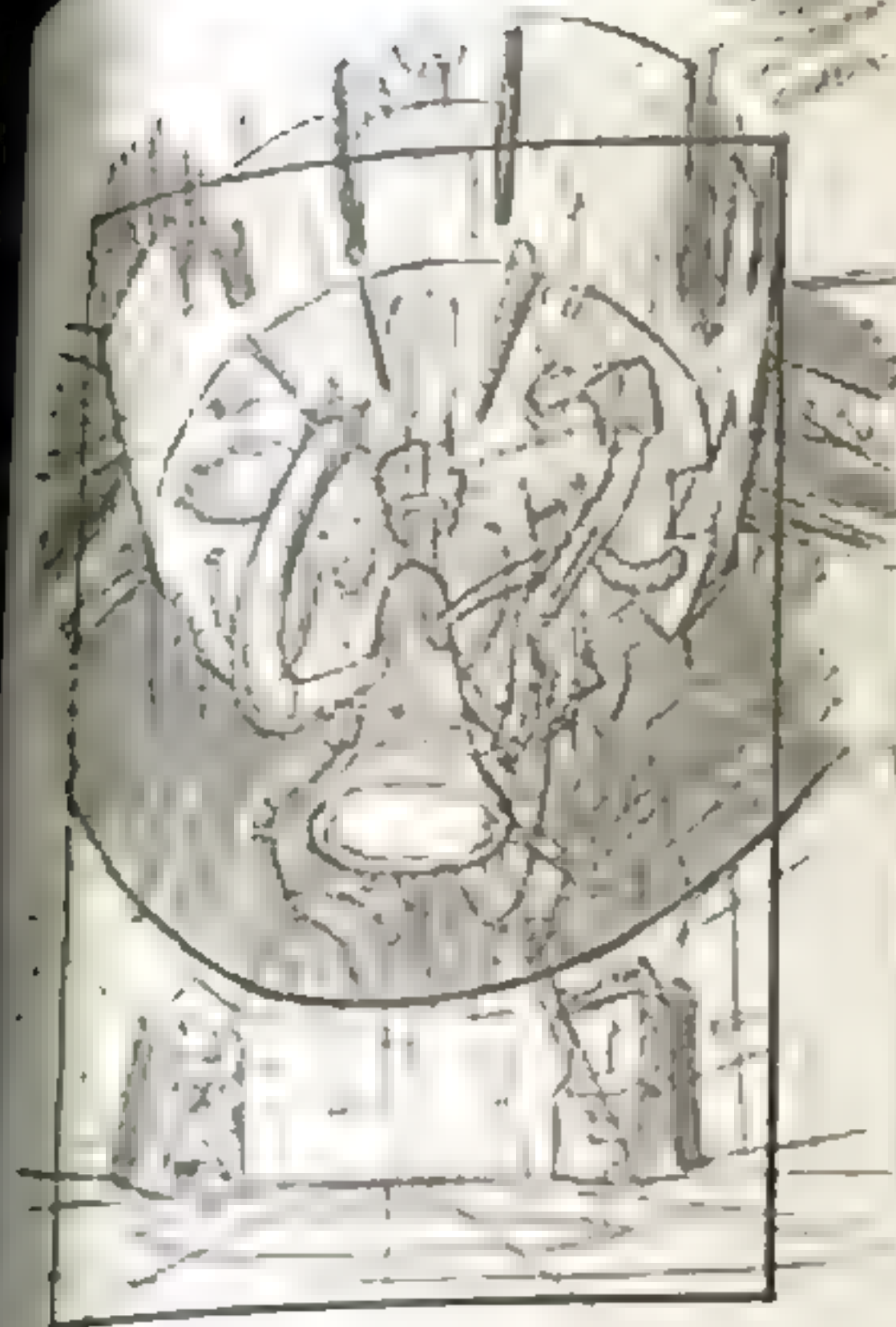


## BACKGROUND DESIGN

**Above** The above sketch from the episode "The Hologram New Girl" EP20 illustrates the final design of the design, which is a layout drawing and

the digitally painted background and the effect of a camera from the background created from water or a similar





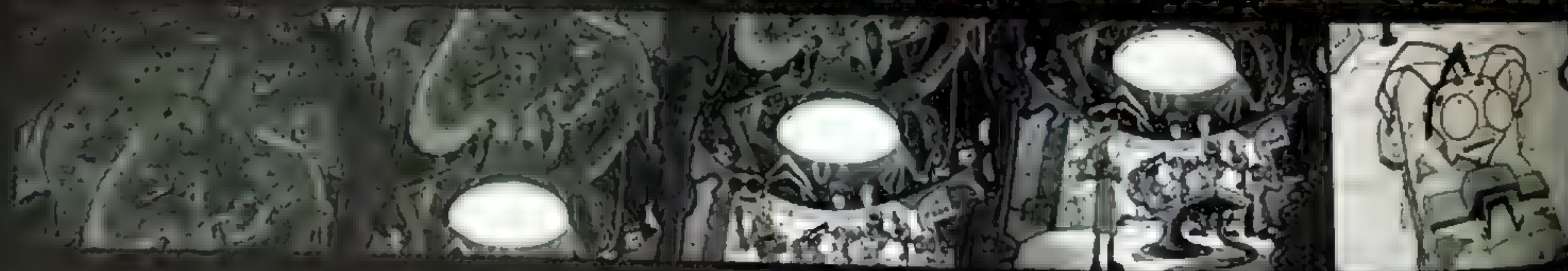
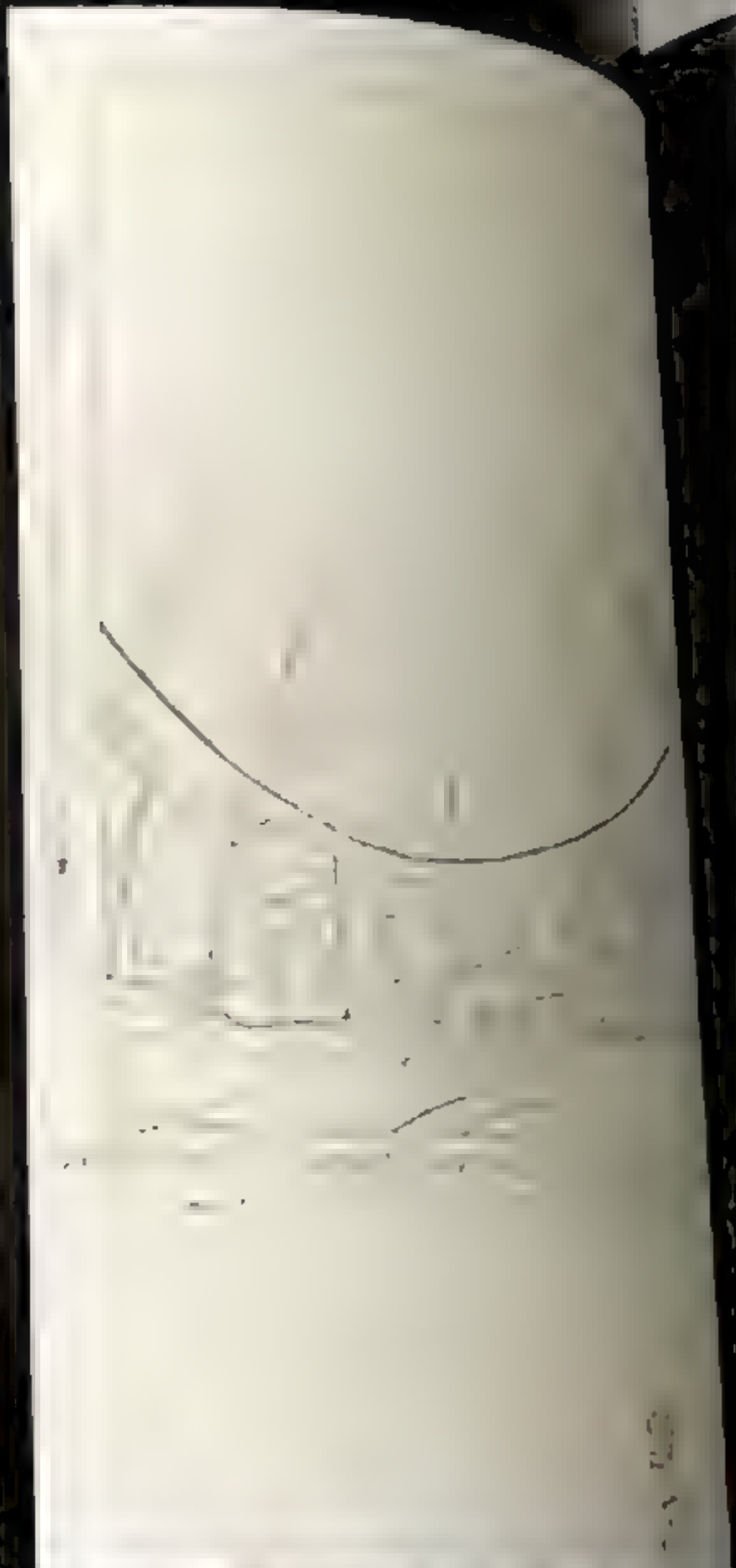
Above: Three pages of storyboards for the episode "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doo!" EP14; were used to plan and visually describe

scene 21, a single shot. The vertical camera move pans down a threatening-looking machine in the Crazy House for Boys under which Derwald

has been. The center panel shows the on-axis foreground elements that pan at a slightly faster rate than the background, creating a parallax effect.







## BACKGROUND DESIGN

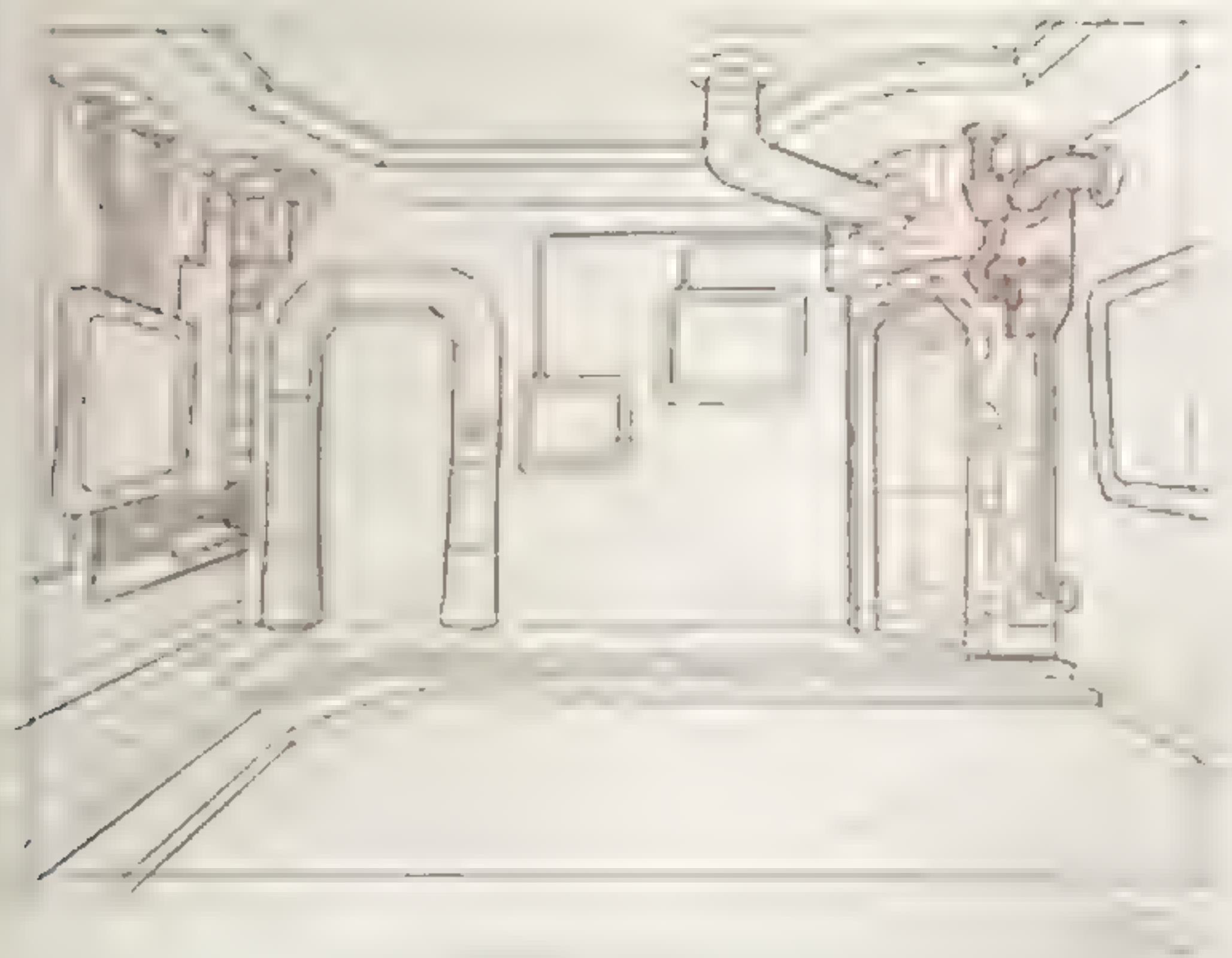
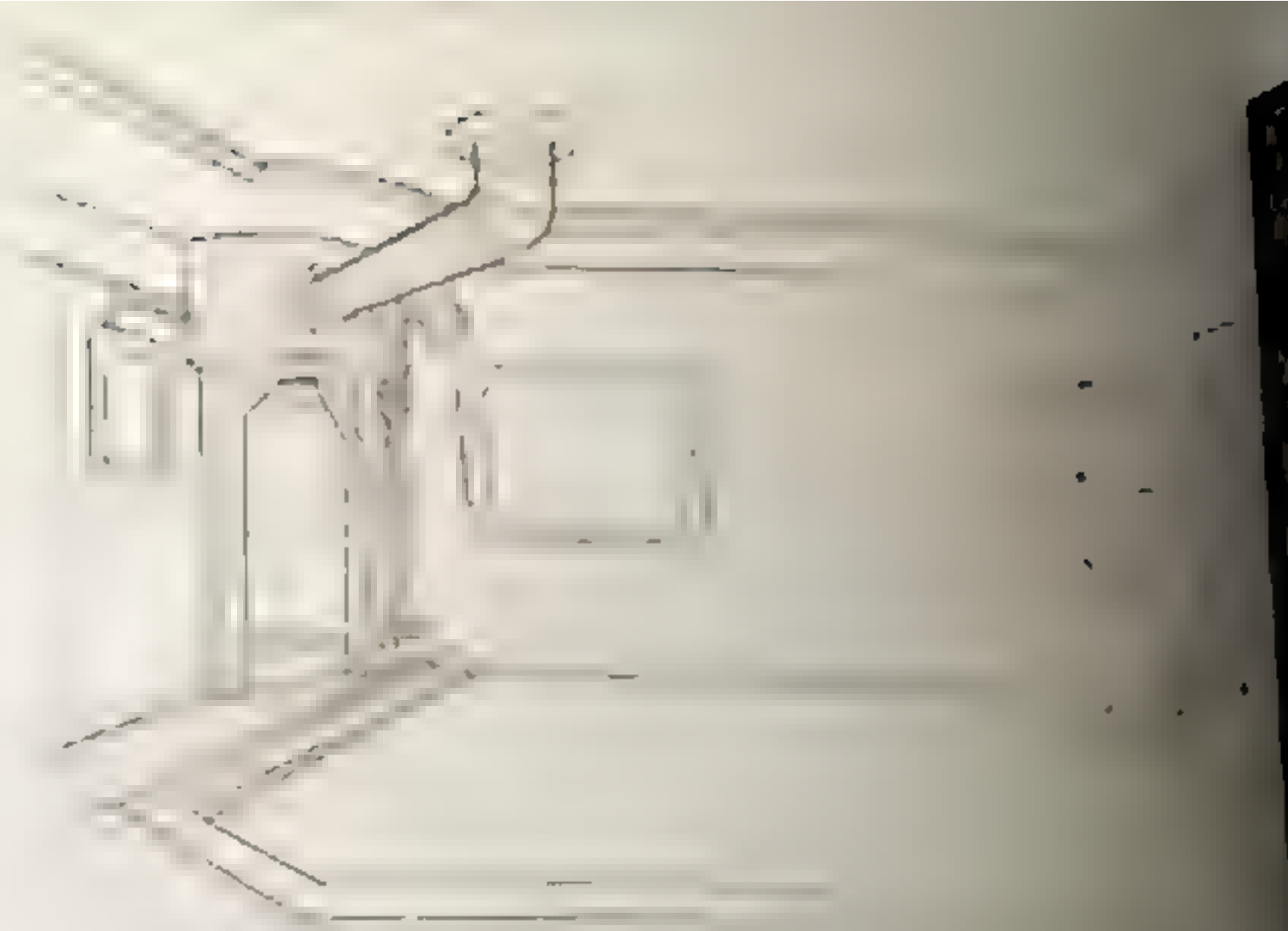
This spread: Additional layout drawings (above) and a background art detail (opposite), from scene 71 in the episode

\*Halloween Spectacular of Sp... (EP14) illustrates the character's board panels on the previous spread









## BACKGROUND DESIGN

Above: Four views of the proposed living room without the curtains and not used. Art by Maurice Vigne.



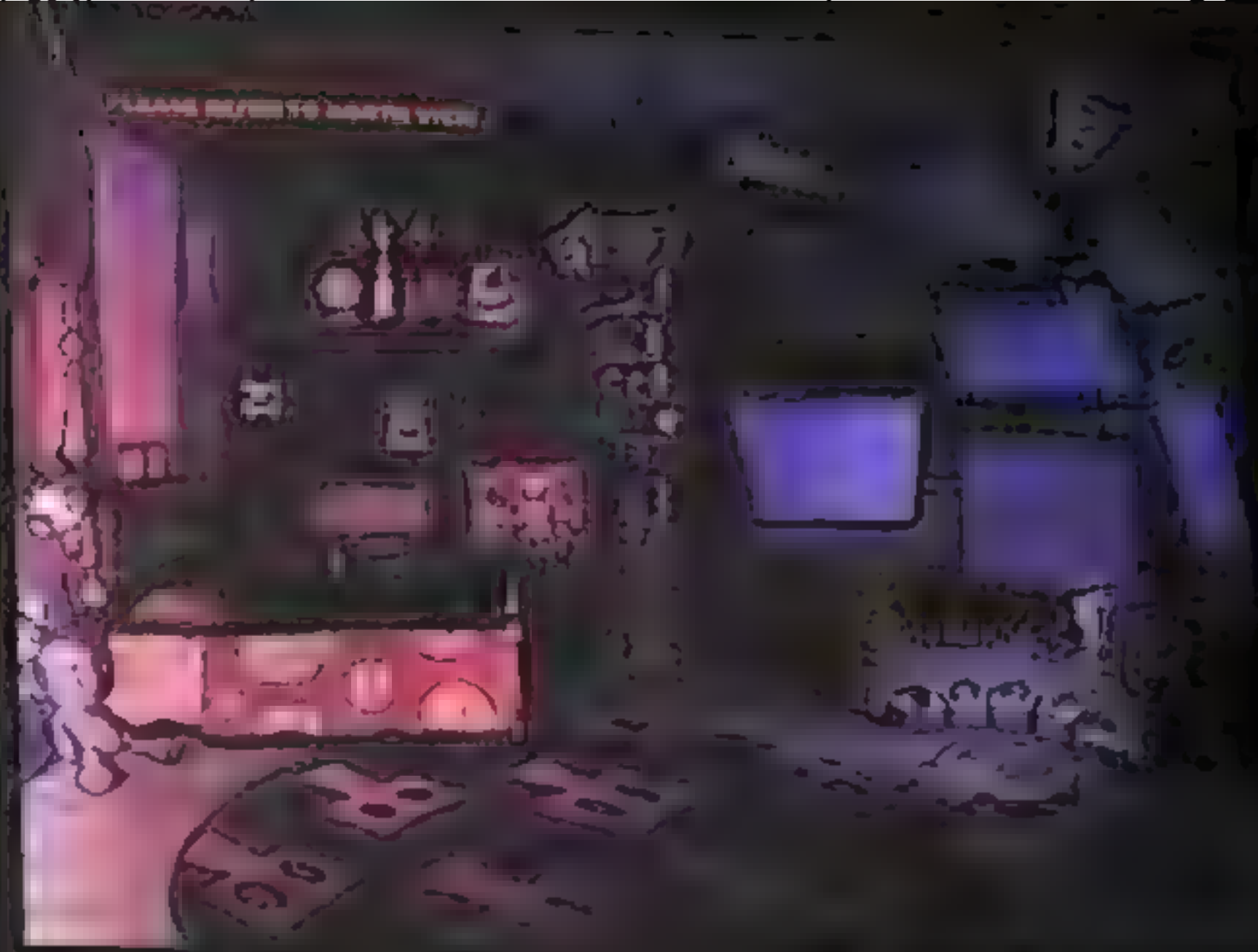


GAL'S BEDROOM

NORTH VIEW

125A-800L-01

GNIEZ



125A-800L-01

GAL'S BEDROOM

NORTH VIEW

GNIEZ



GNIEZ



125A-800L-01

GAL'S BEDROOM

NORTH VIEW

GNIEZ

Above: The views of Gal's bedroom from the north and south, showing the large, dark, rounded object and the doorway.



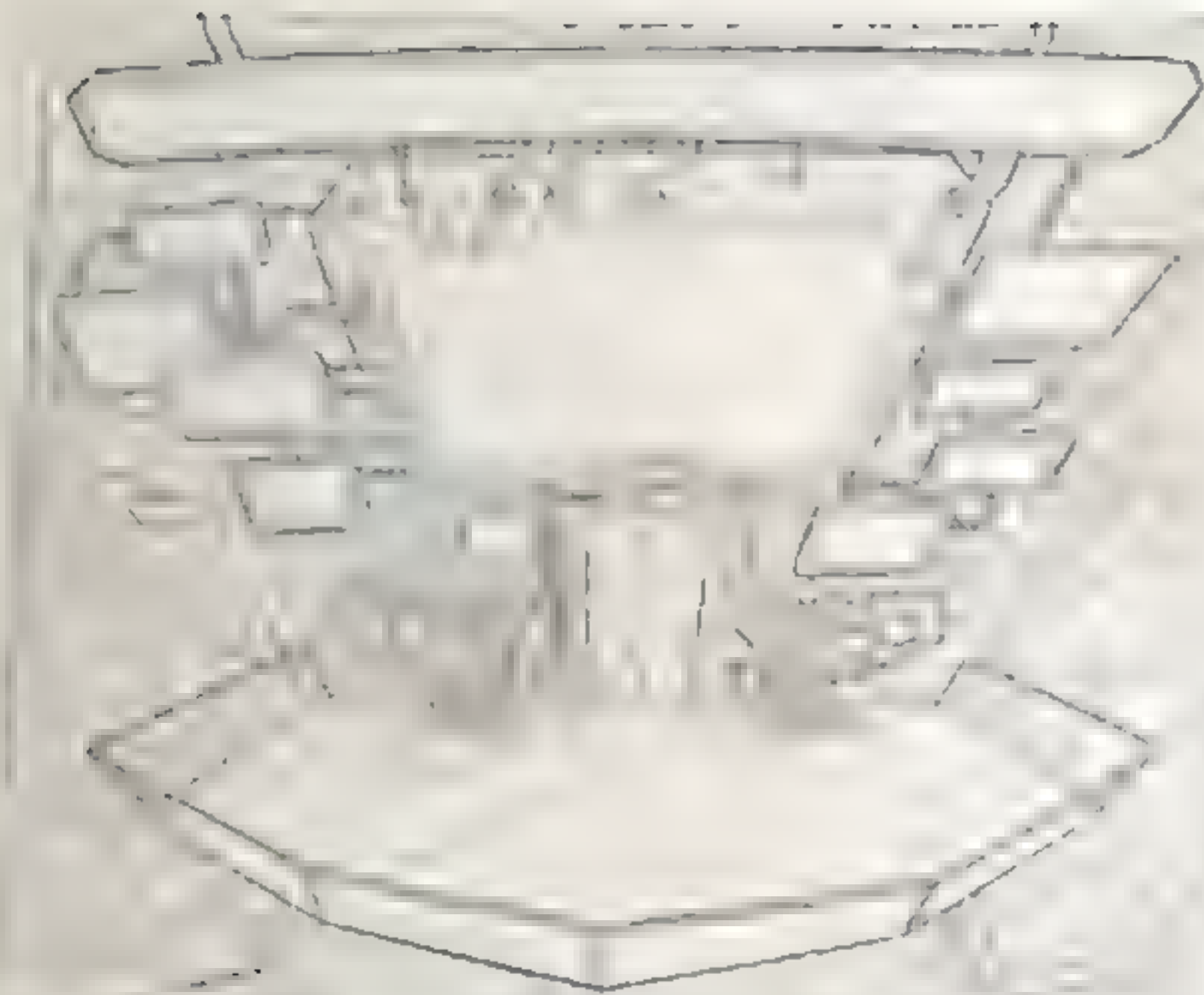
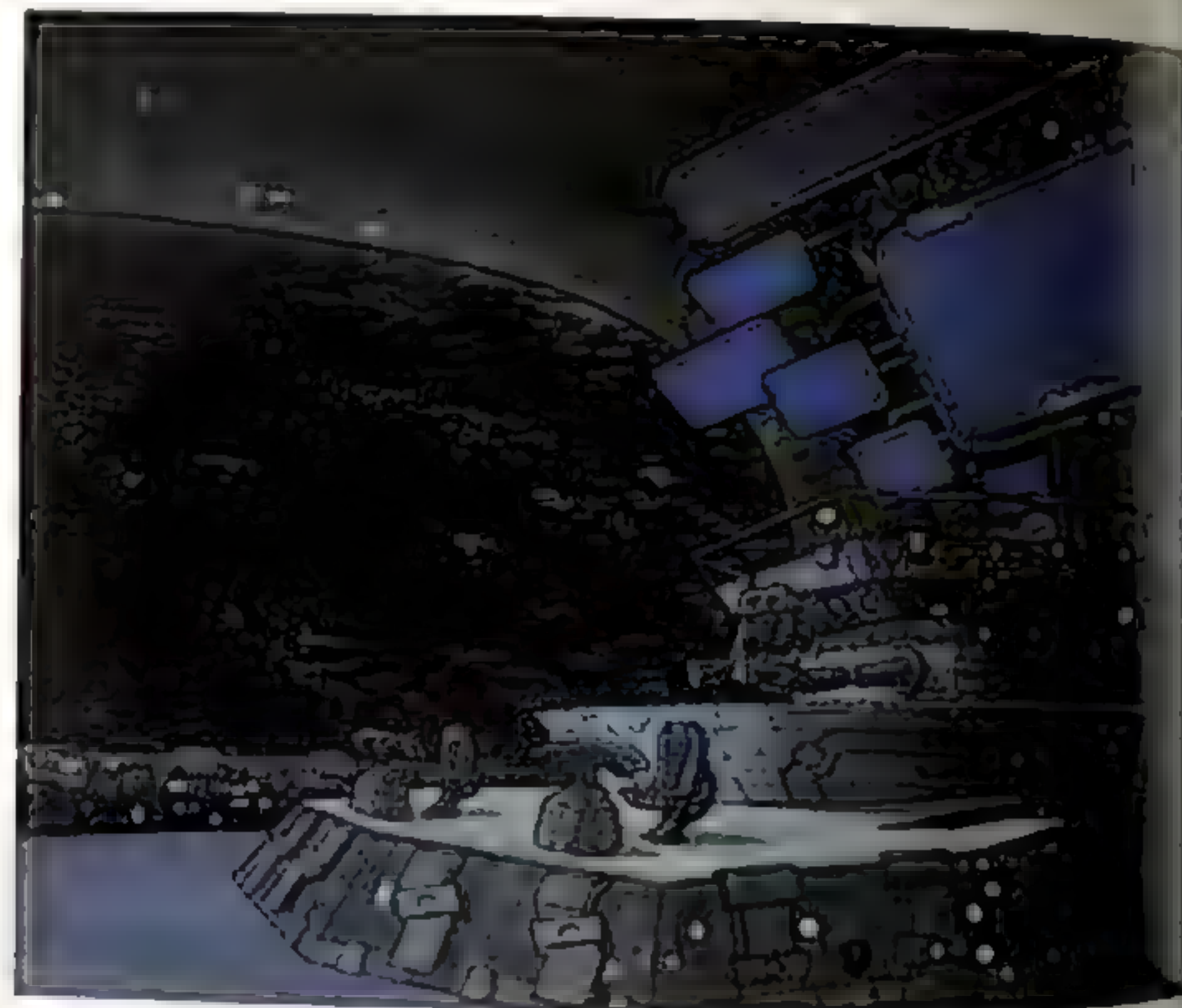


FIGURE 1-1  
A. 1-1

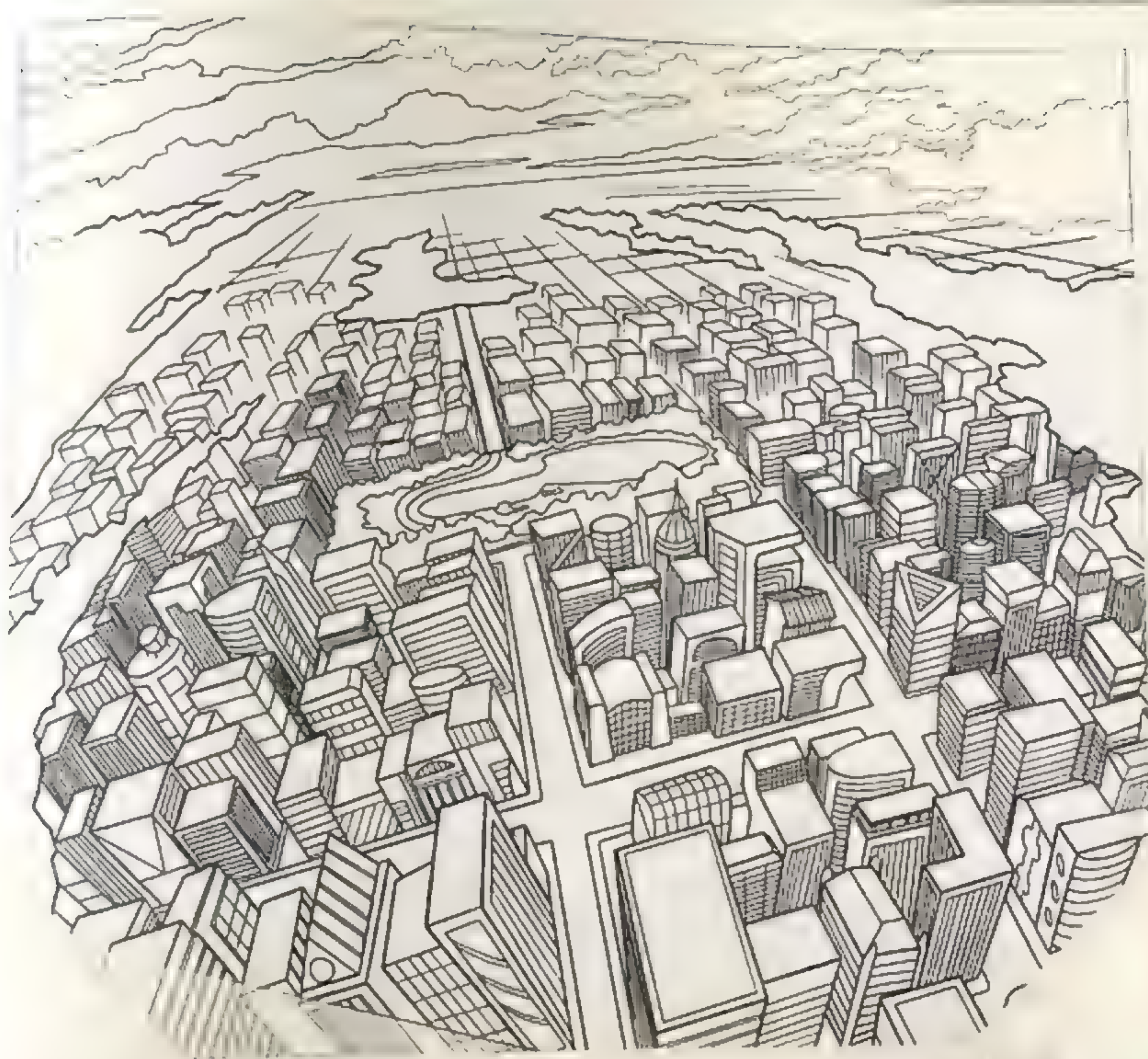


FIGURE 1-2  
A. 1-2



# BACKGROUND DESIGN





112B-B033-01

**Opposite:** Three layout drawings and a painted background of the interior of the Vortex ship that The Resistance group of rebel aliens use when

attacking the Hutt armada and their flagship *Mawla*, from the episode "Backseat Drivers from Beyond the Stars" (EP21).

**Above:** Another complex view of the city back on Earth, from the episode "Gone Slave 2" (EP125). Art by Maurice Morgan.



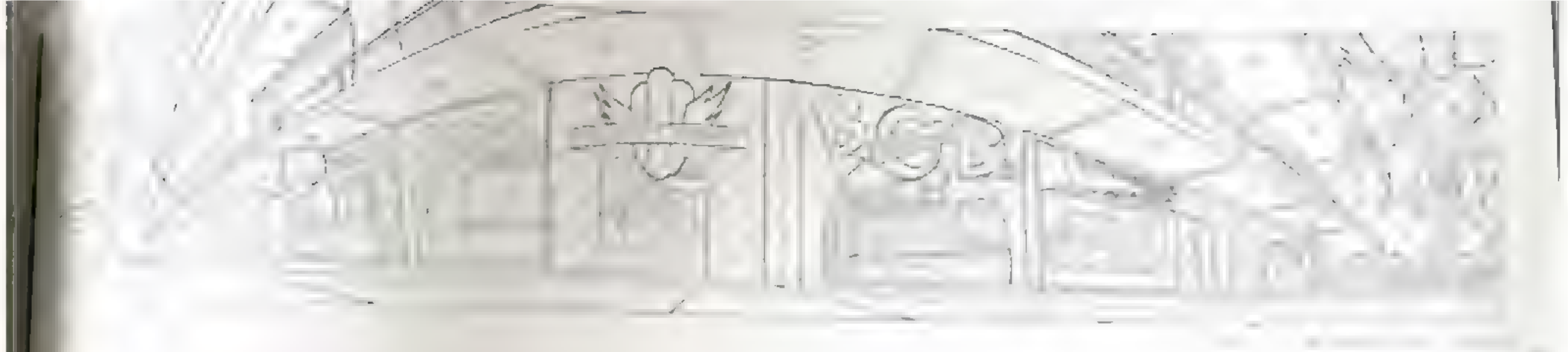


03-5-01 204 BRAIN 148 B 1.67 50 2.4



03-5-01 204 BRAIN 148 B 1.67 50 2.4





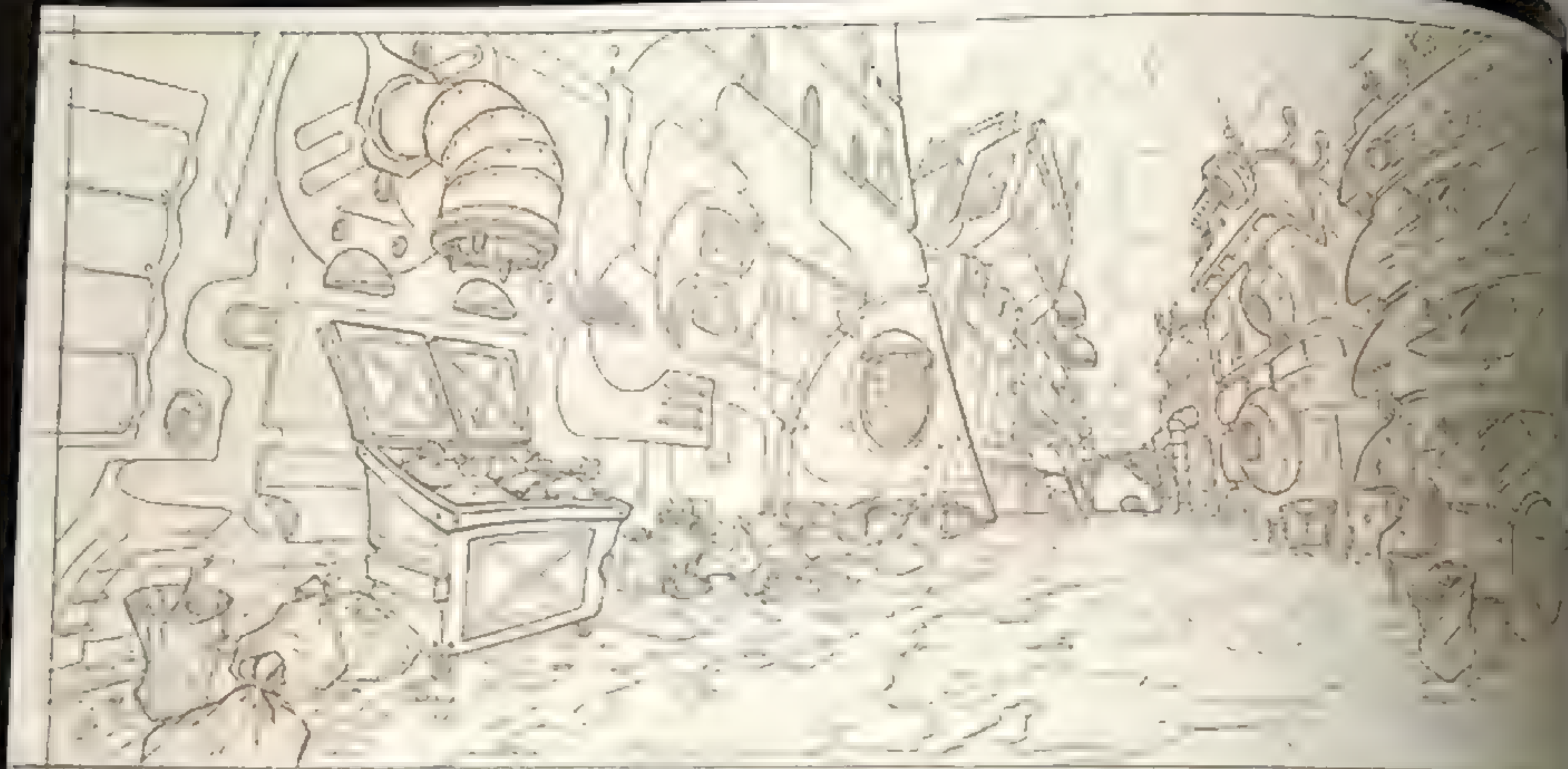
CONTINUE



10/11/11

B42701





KEY 120B - 1009.01 S. 105 EF



THE HEROES NEW GRL 'EXT PLOT' 'GARDEN' REX



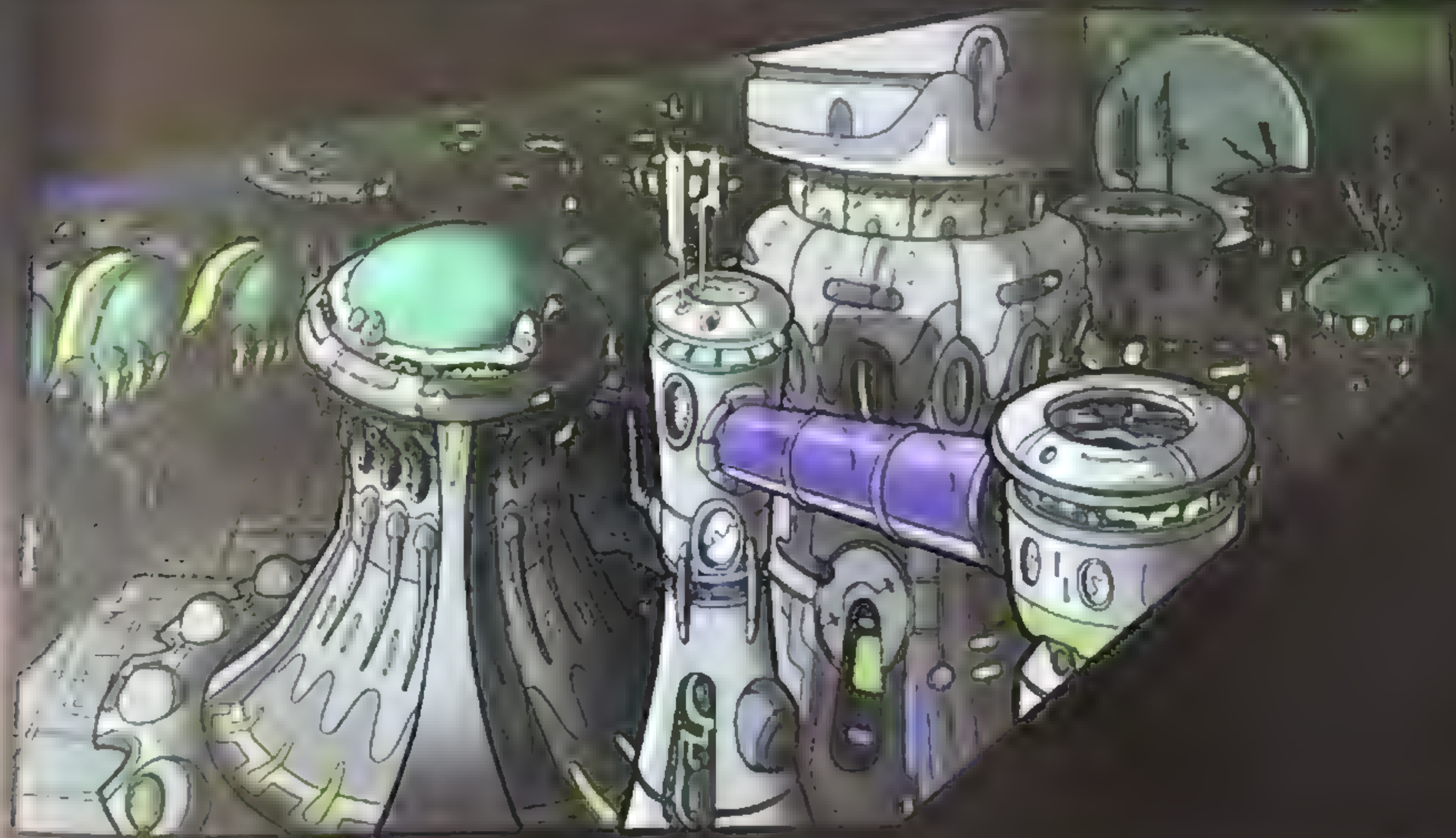
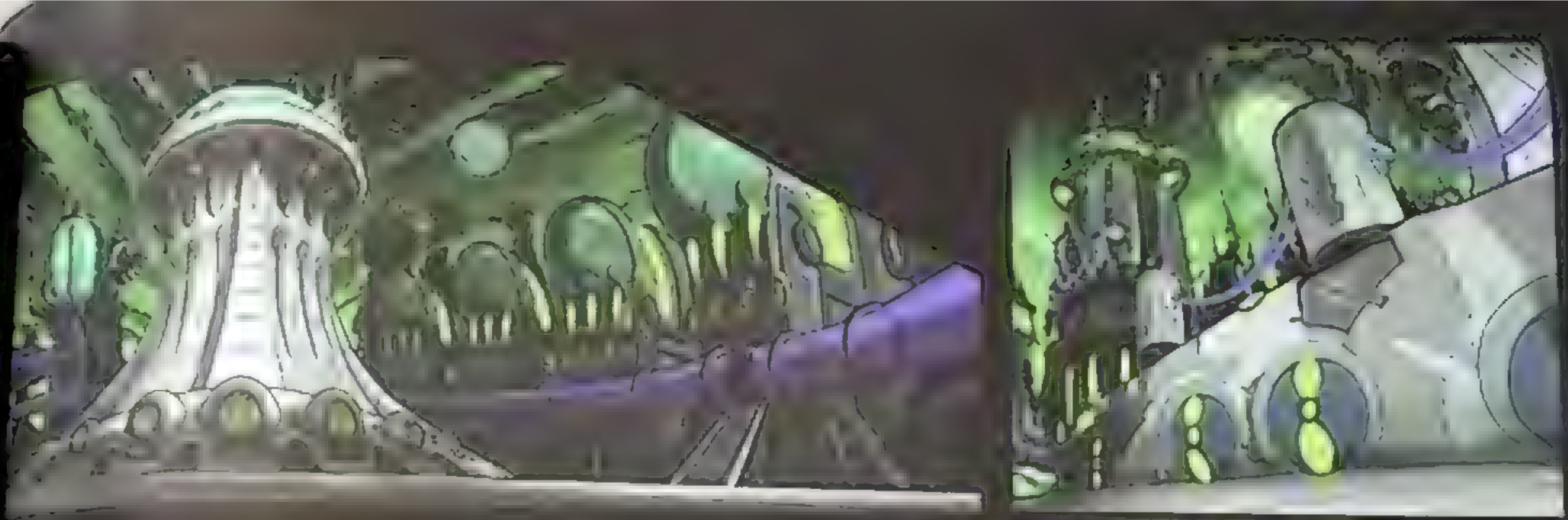
THE HEROES NEW GRL 'EXT PLOT' 'GARDEN' REX

Handwritten notes in a cursive script, likely describing the scene or providing context for the illustrations. The text is partially obscured by the watercolor washes.

## **BACKGROUND DESIGN**

Previous spread Examples  
moves are designed as they  
that appear to change perspective





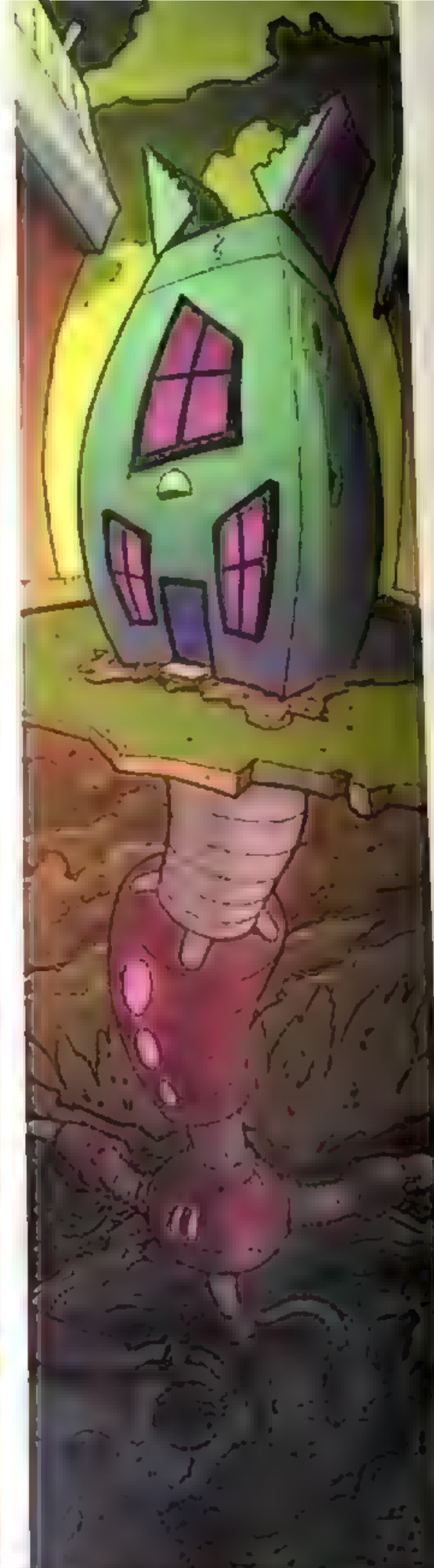
THE  
FUTURE  
OF  
THE  
FUTURE

THE  
FUTURE  
OF  
THE  
FUTURE

This spread was designed by  
Suzanne G. Anderson, Senior Layout  
Artist, for the book "The Future of the Future"

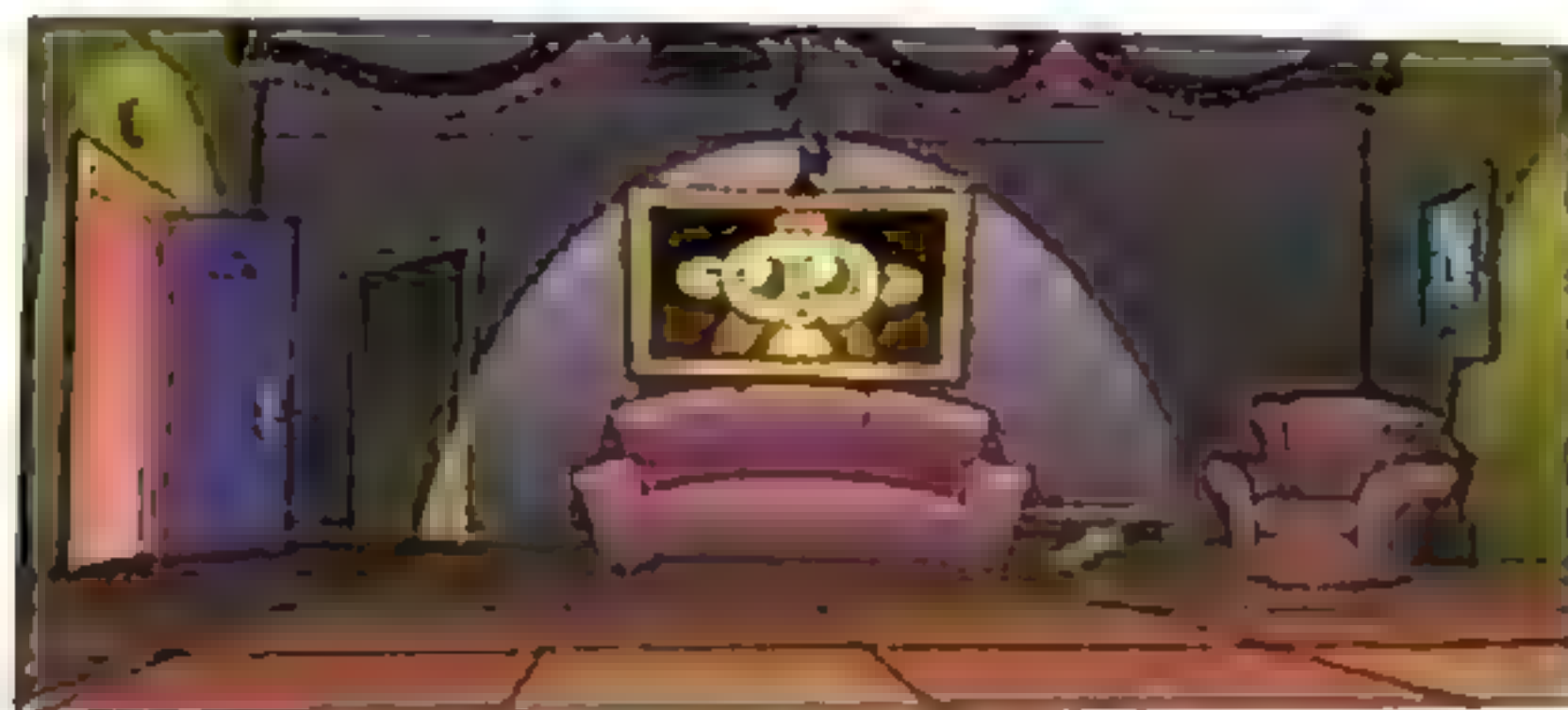
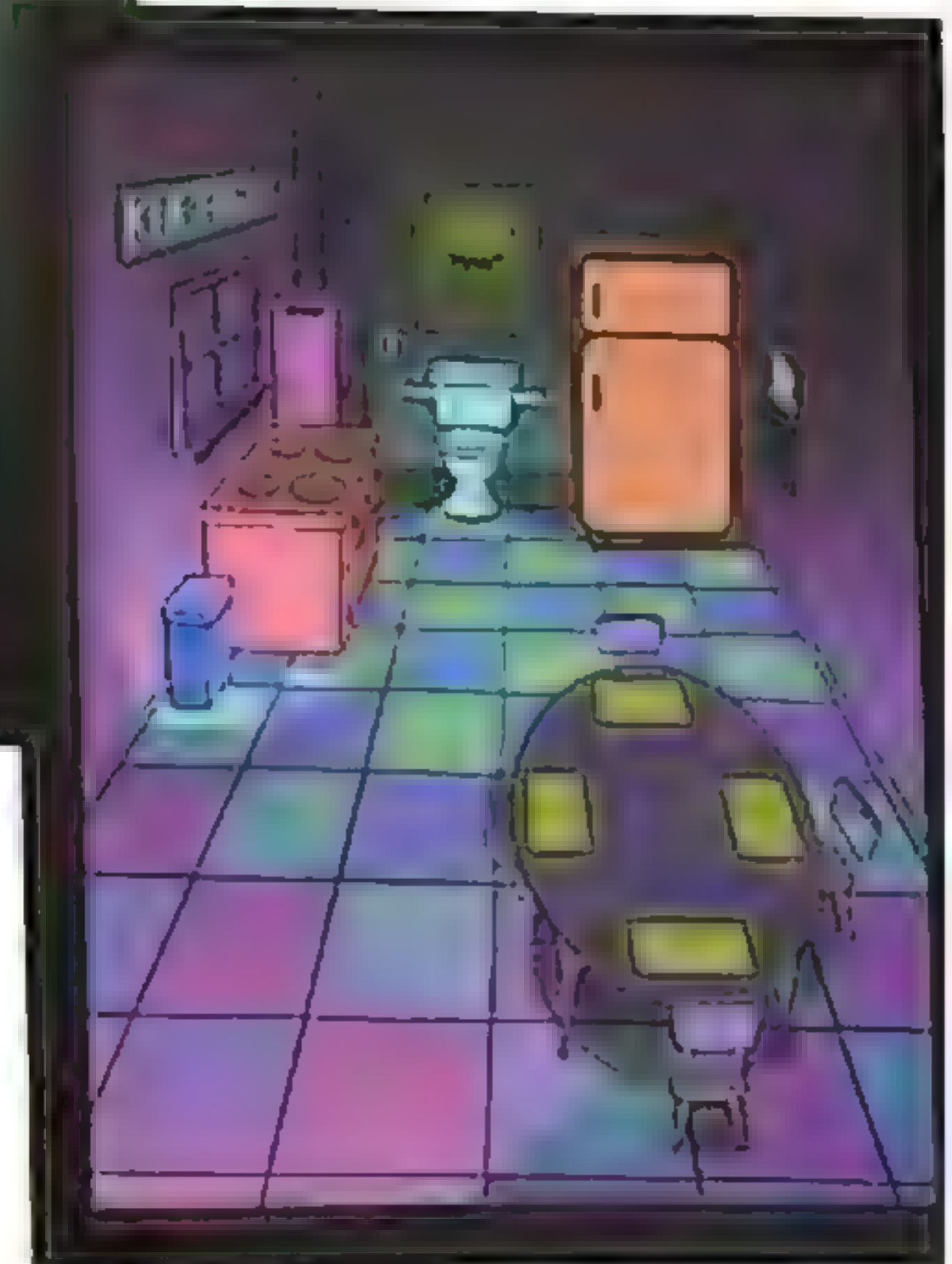
The book "The Future of the Future" is  
a collection of essays by various authors  
on the future of the future.





## BACKGROUND DESIGN





here [background designer]: "The  
he had that really dark edge to  
it so cool. That was huge. The

color, the lighting." Jaro Lizarazu [background  
designer]: "Riki and Jhonin would hang out in a  
room where it was so dark that you couldn't see

your hand in front of your face. All you saw was  
Riki sit up with his screen in his eyes and his  
only hair. You'd think, 'What the hell is going on

in there?' And what Jhonin did to that room; of  
course he put all kinds of tubes in it."





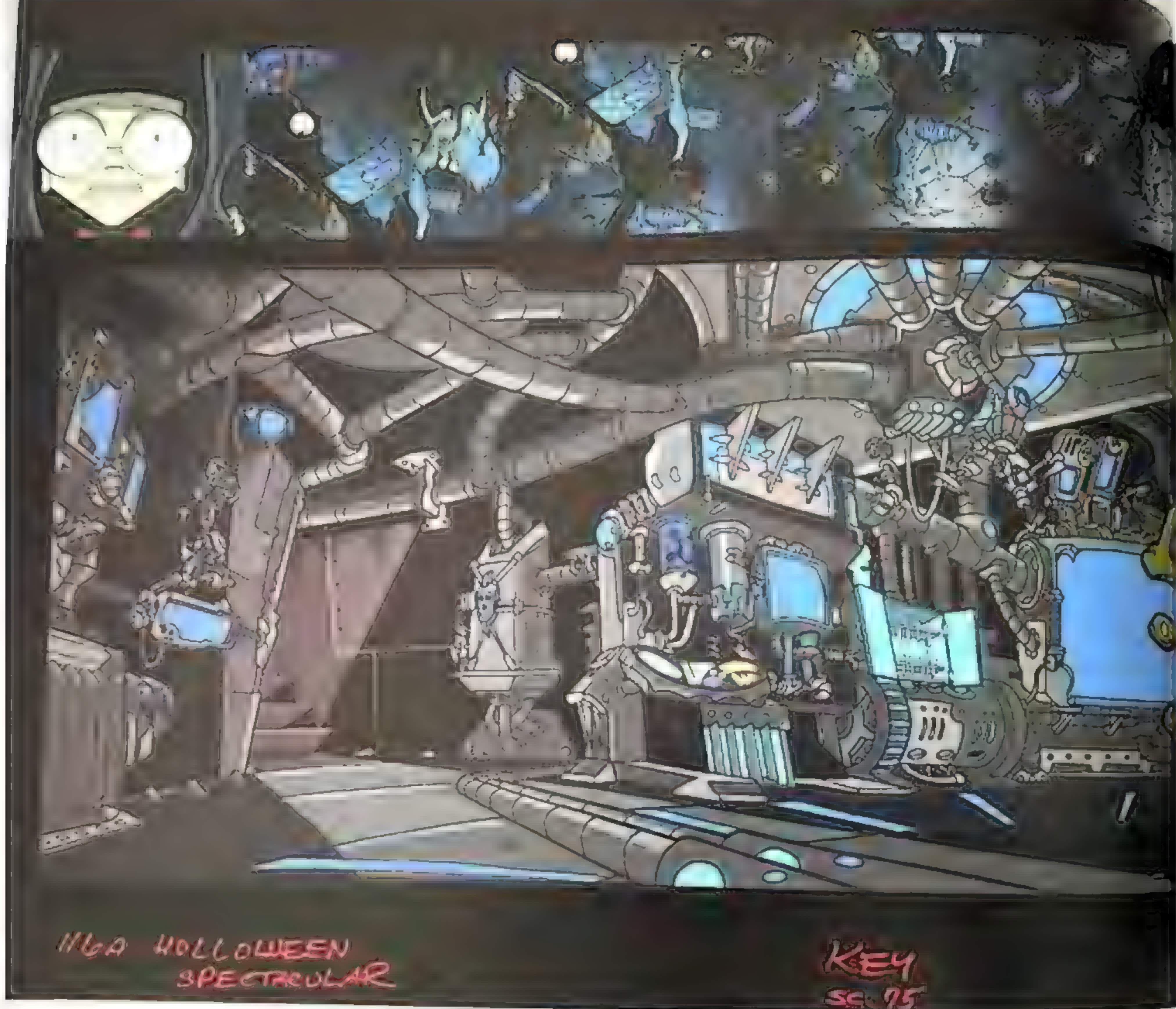
BACKGROUND DESIGN



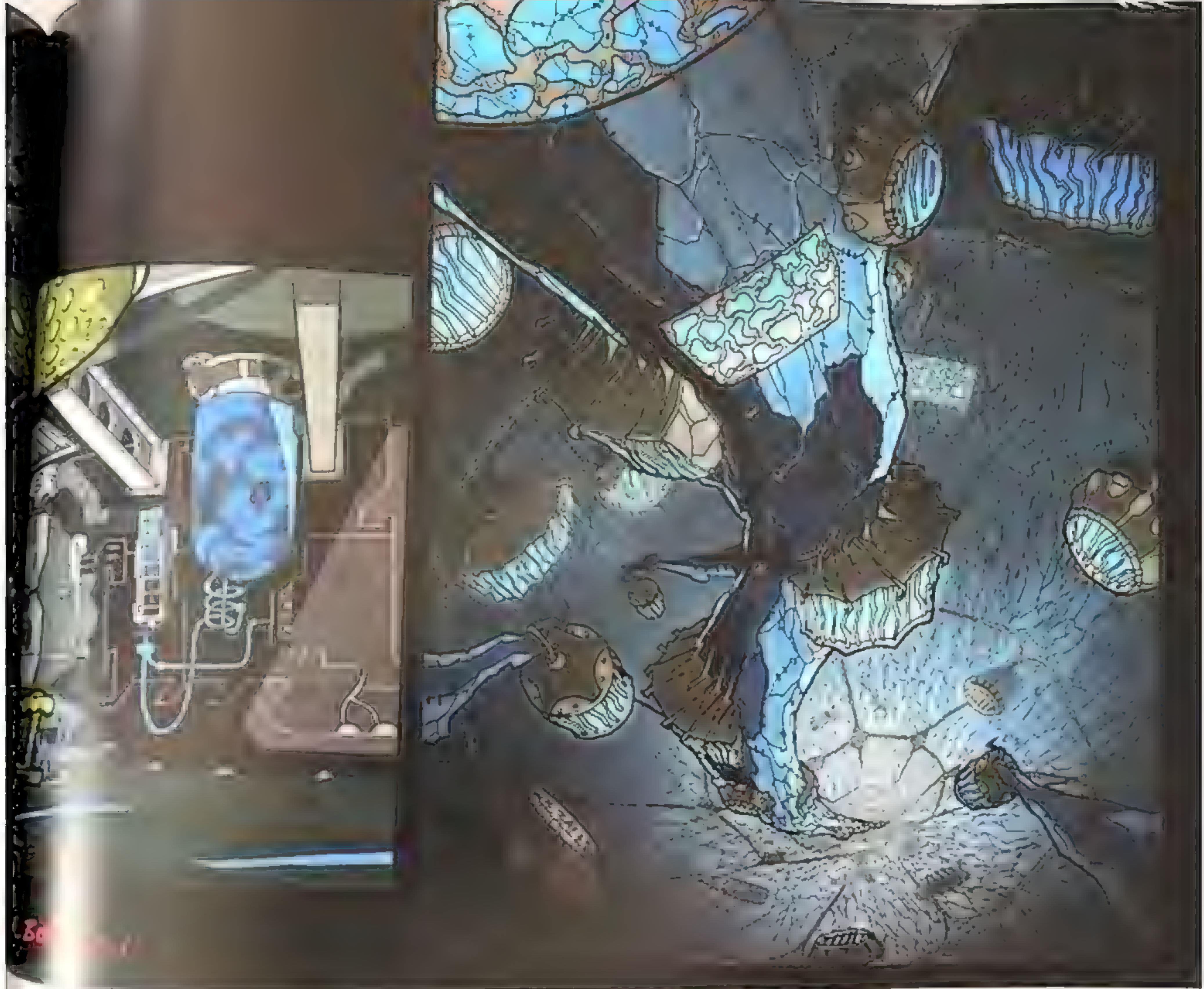


This spread: Background art of the City  
Caspool and The City.

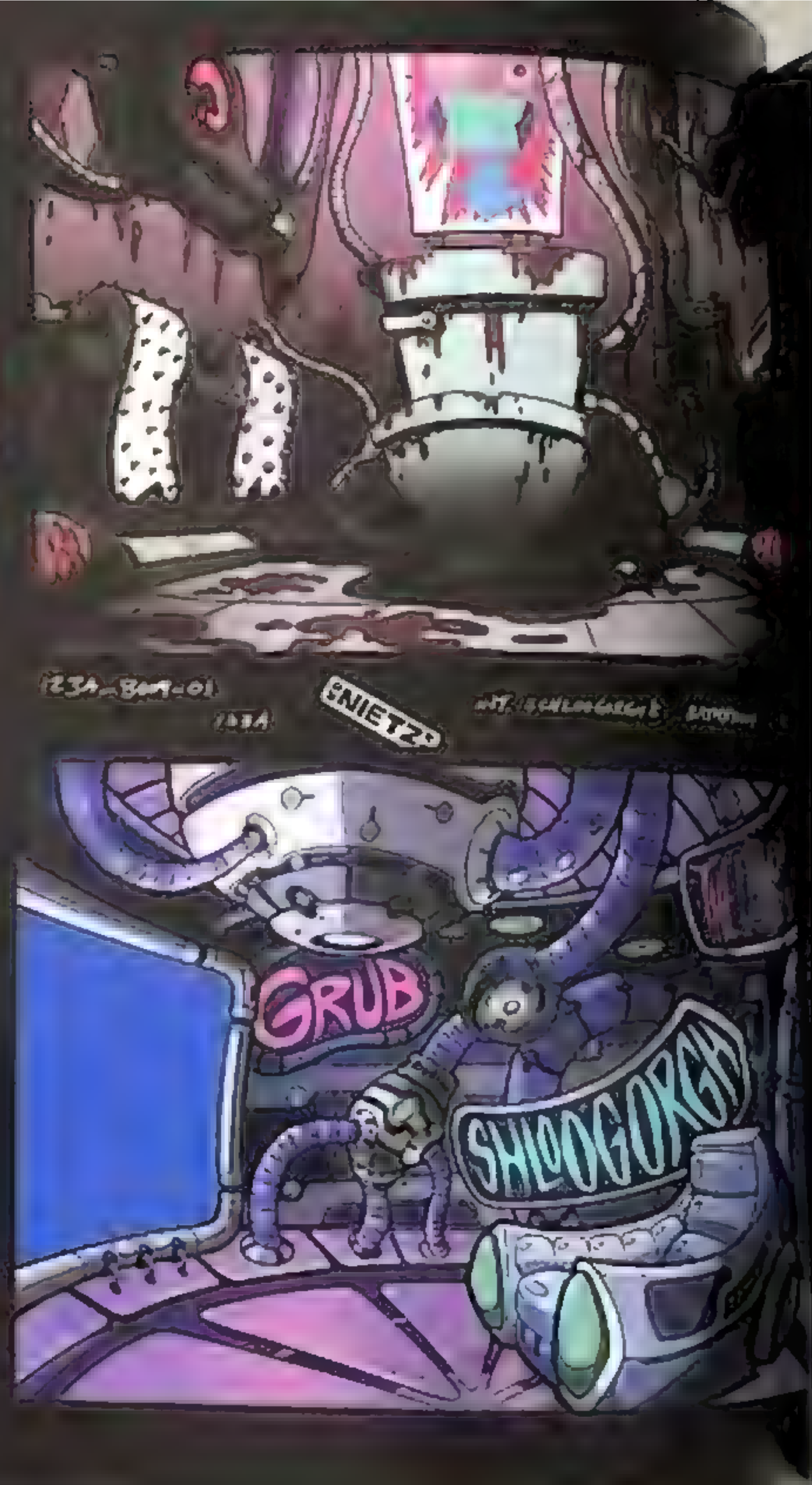
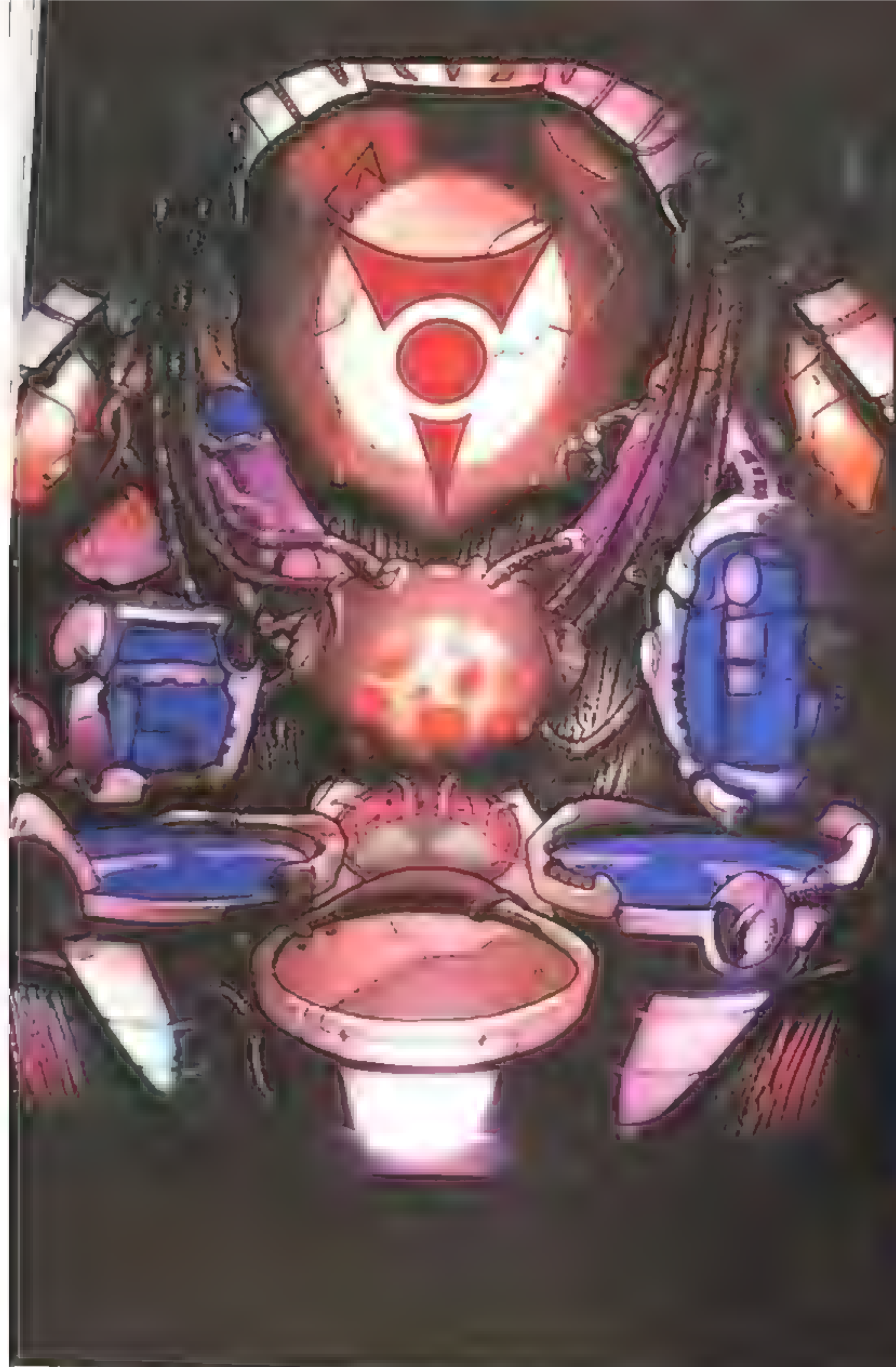












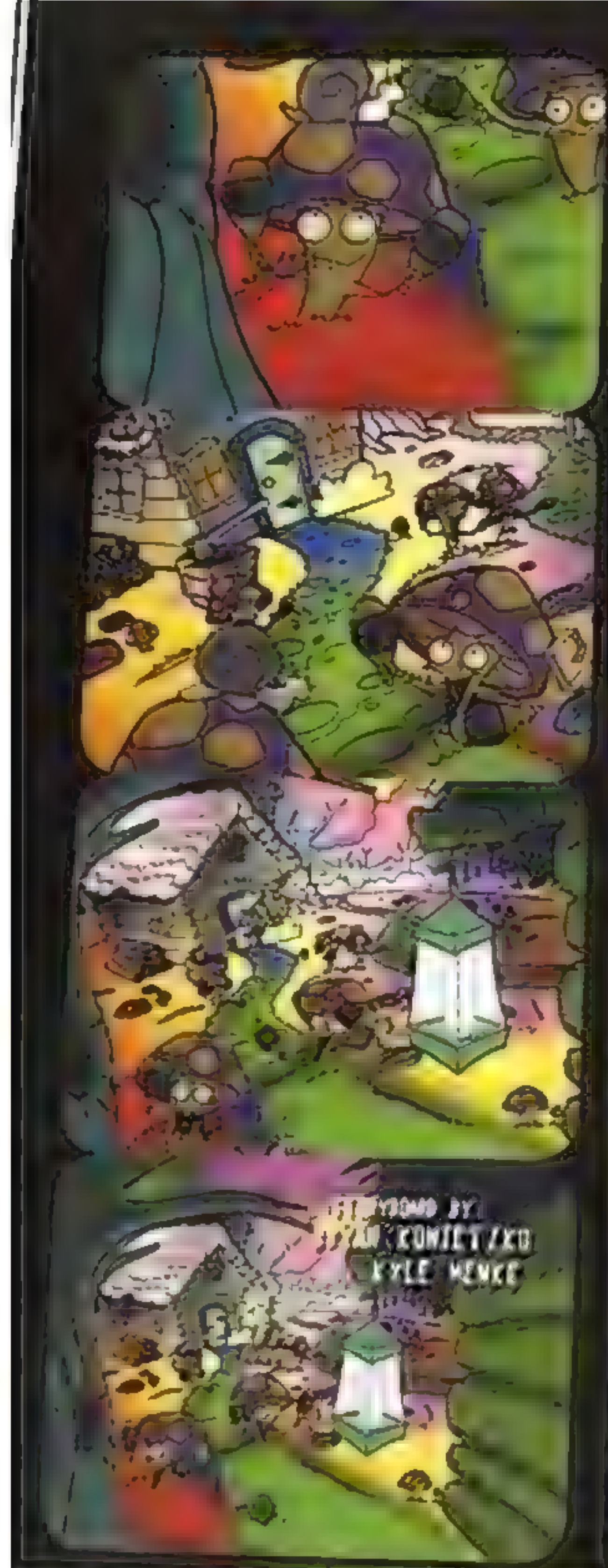
 BACKGROUND DESIGN





This spread features a variety of colorful, hand-drawn illustrations of a fantastical, industrial-themed landscape. The scene is divided into several panels, each showing different parts of the environment. The top left panel shows a large, green, mechanical structure with a yellow 'S' on its side, surrounded by various colorful, abstract shapes and a sign that says 'enter'. The top right panel shows a dark, industrial interior with a large, glowing blue sphere and a sign that says 'EXIT'. The bottom left panel shows a large, green, mechanical structure with a yellow 'S' on its side, surrounded by various colorful, abstract shapes and a sign that says 'SHLOOGOR'. The bottom right panel shows a large, glowing blue sphere with a sign that says 'EXIT'. The entire scene is set against a dark, industrial background with various pipes, valves, and mechanical components.





**NICKTOONS ANIMATION**

Scene	Time	Director	Animator	Editor	Sound	Music	Color	Final
1	0:00							
2	0:05							
3	0:10							
4	0:15							
5	0:20							
6	0:25							
7	0:30							
8	0:35							
9	0:40							
10	0:45							
11	0:50							
12	0:55							
13	1:00							
14	1:05							
15	1:10							
16	1:15							
17	1:20							
18	1:25							
19	1:30							
20	1:35							
21	1:40							
22	1:45							
23	1:50							
24	1:55							
25	2:00							
26	2:05							
27	2:10							
28	2:15							
29	2:20							
30	2:25							
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85	7:00							
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91	7:30							
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97	8:00							
98	8:05							
99	8:10							
100	8:15							



## DIRECTION

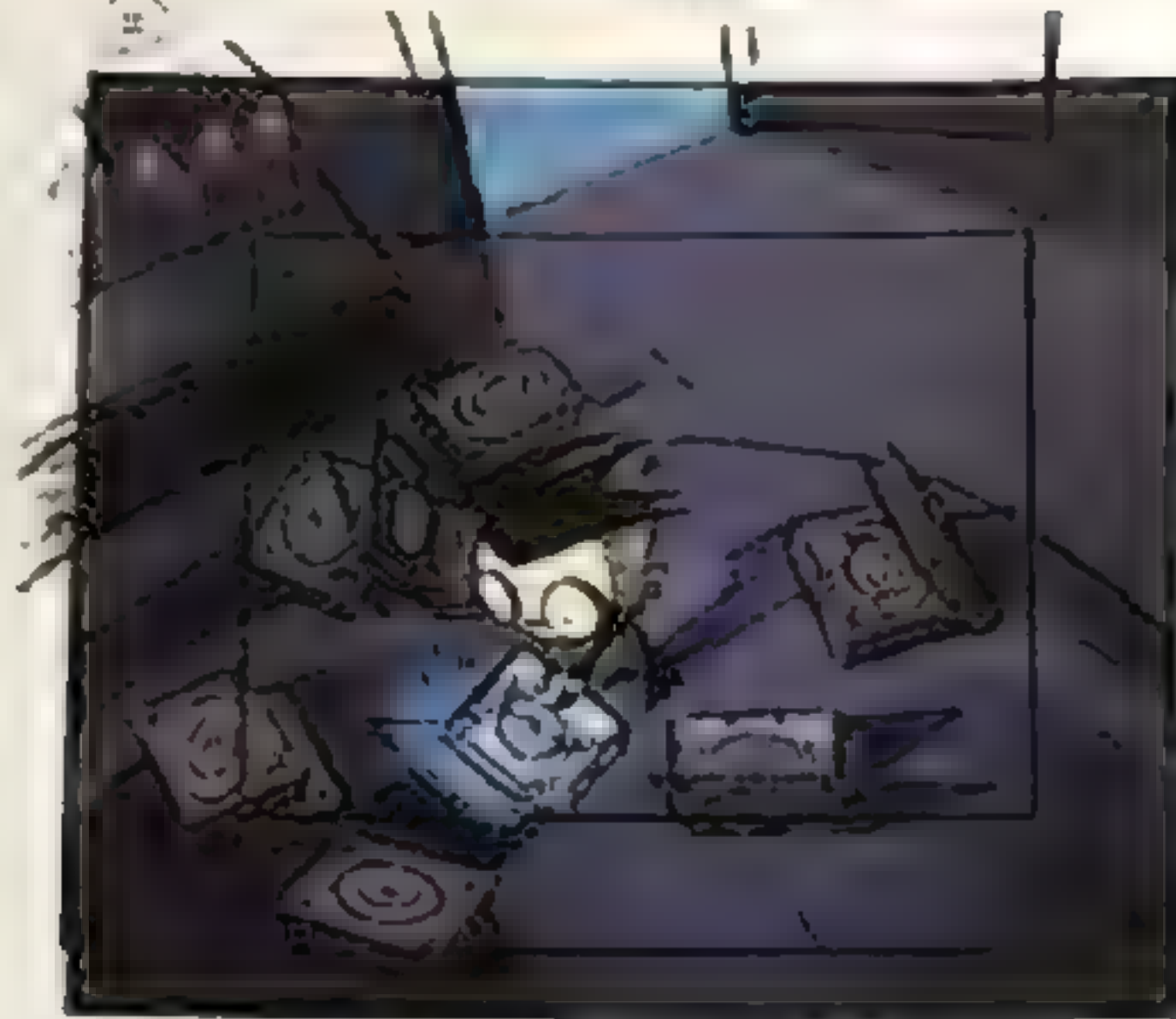
**This spread:** The narrative sheets, sometimes called X sheets or dope sheets, are a tool for directors to describe visually how each animated

movement should be timed on a scene. They draw the action based on the timing in these plans. Ms. Bates says, "The









COLOR THIS PANEL

1.15 IN-HAND TUTION  
PEDDS "REDMONITOR"  
BG "RED MINIOR"



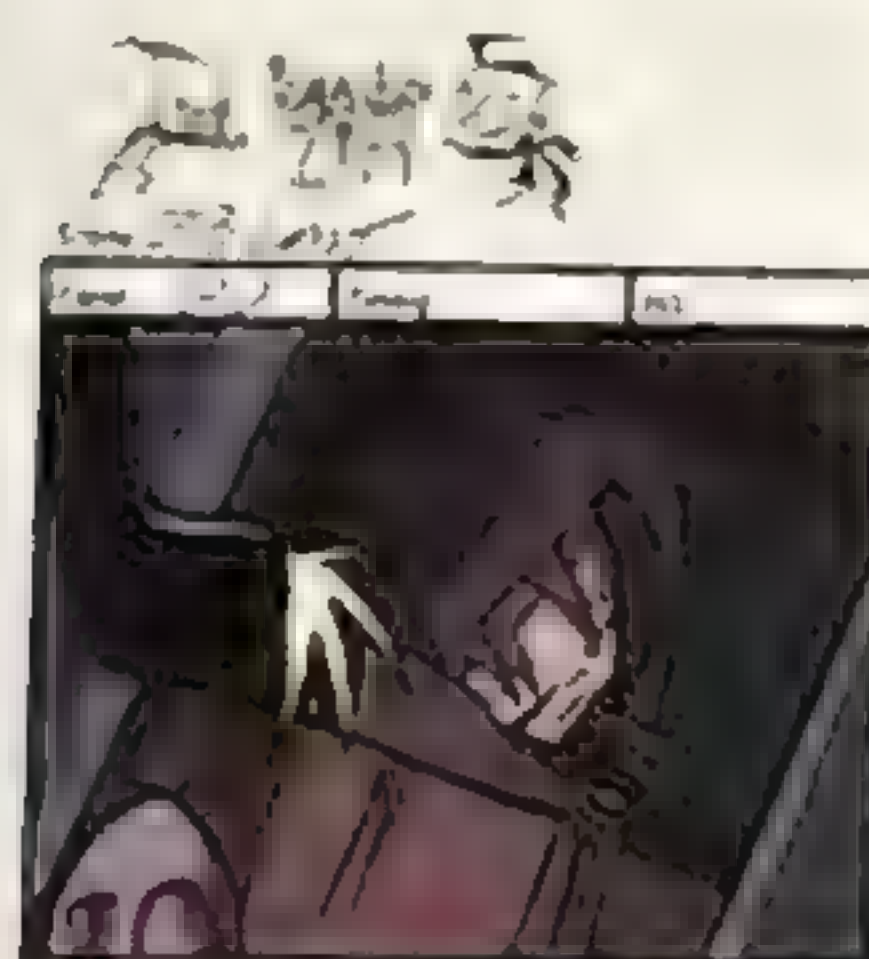
(SP) 6x



FX  
200"

COMPUTER 200"

SLOW TRUCK OUT  
W/ CROSS 4<sup>th</sup> TO. DRINK  
6.55 X-DIG



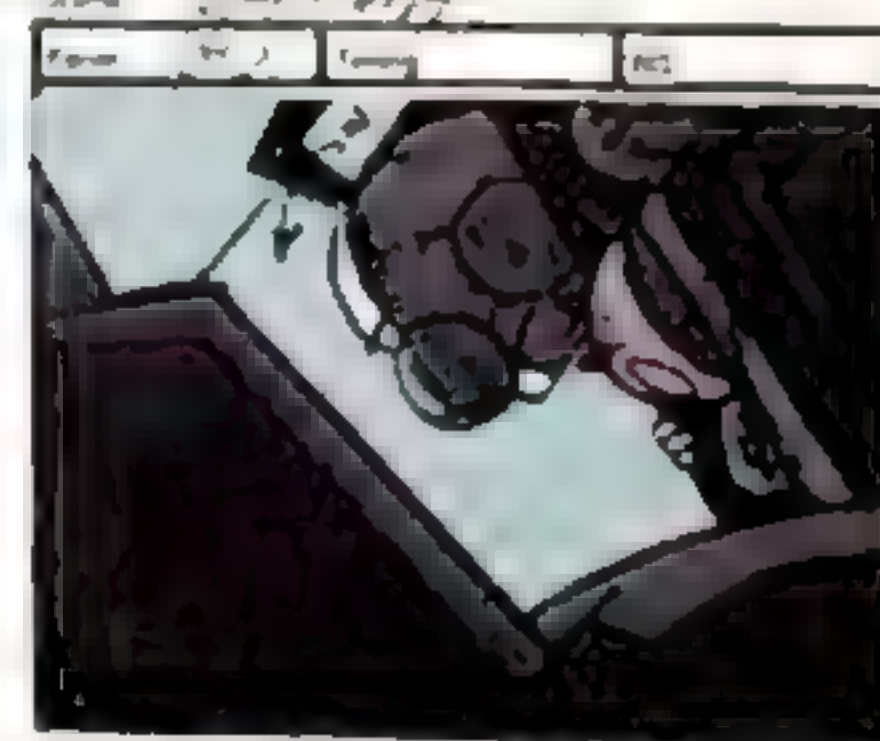
DIALOGUE

GA2 "PURPLE"  
LIKE DB IN "LIFE OF DOOM"



DIALOGUE

GA24 2.2  
"PAC"

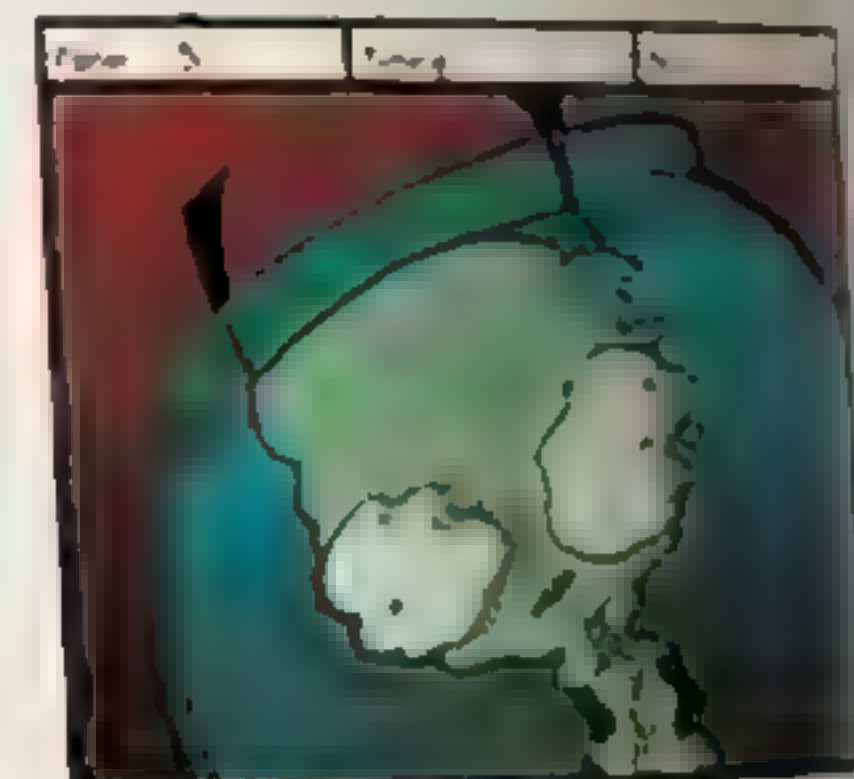


DIALOGUE

DB HERS HEAD



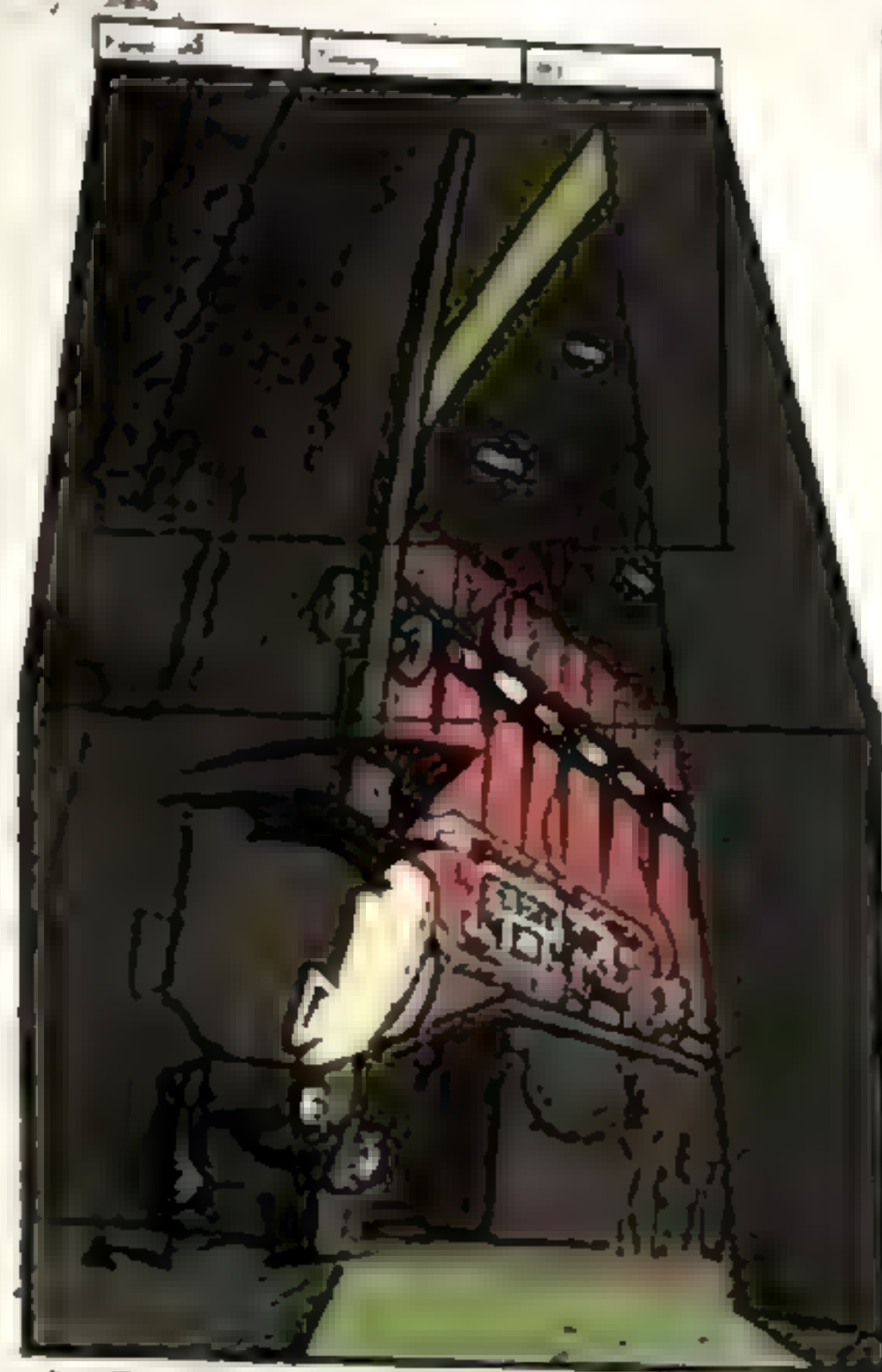
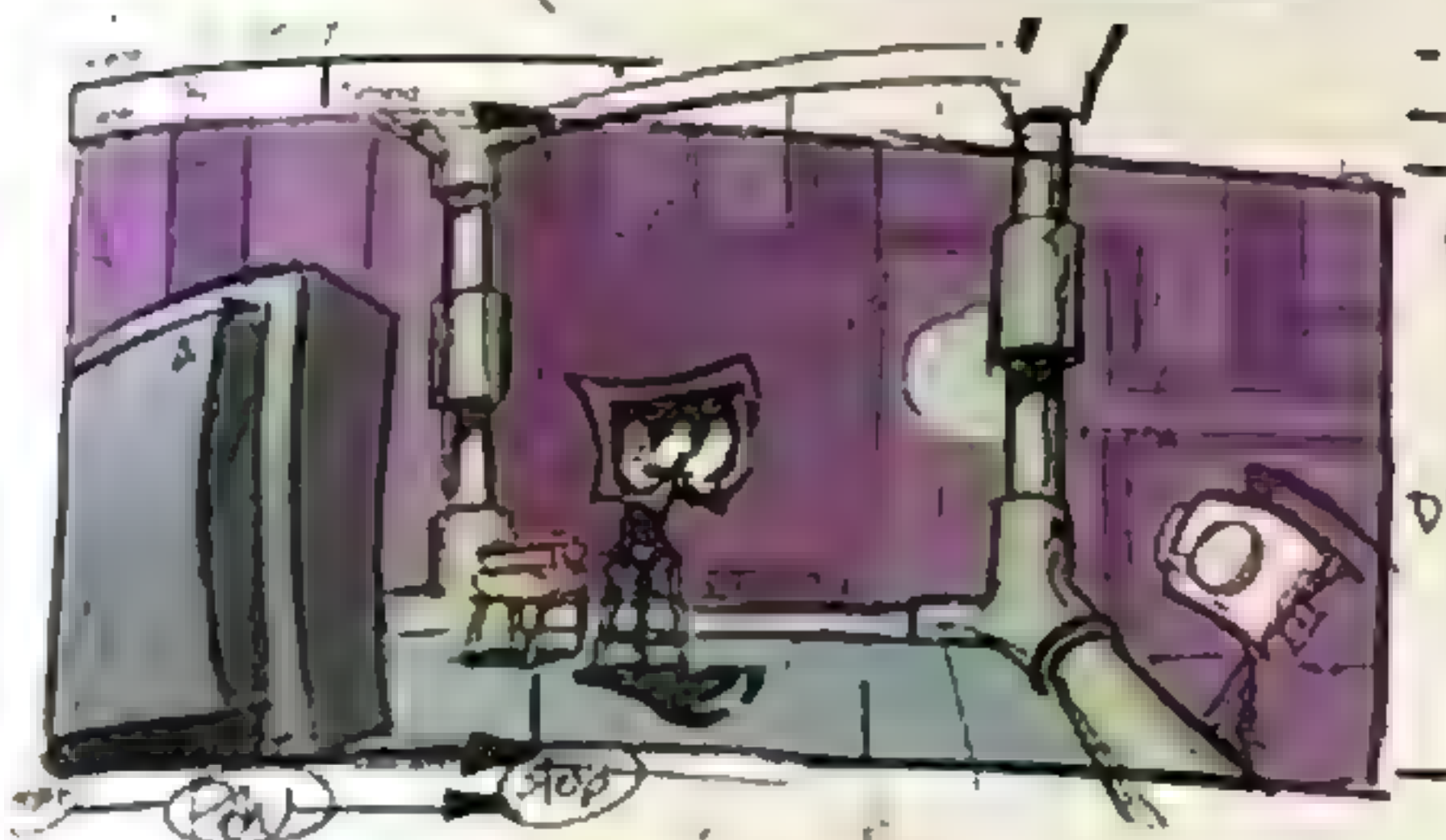
DB "XRIM"



DIALOGUE

 COLOR KEYS





Dim. (23)  
P. 4 (1000)

③ EX 110 COT SHAW 2.2 pm

100-122



Color this page  
part D: "ordinary"

23

**This spread:** To achieve specific looks in the color design, some key moments in Zia's storyboards were sketched over in digital color as a key for

the animation production studio to reference. These moments often related to special dramatic lighting conditions and effects.



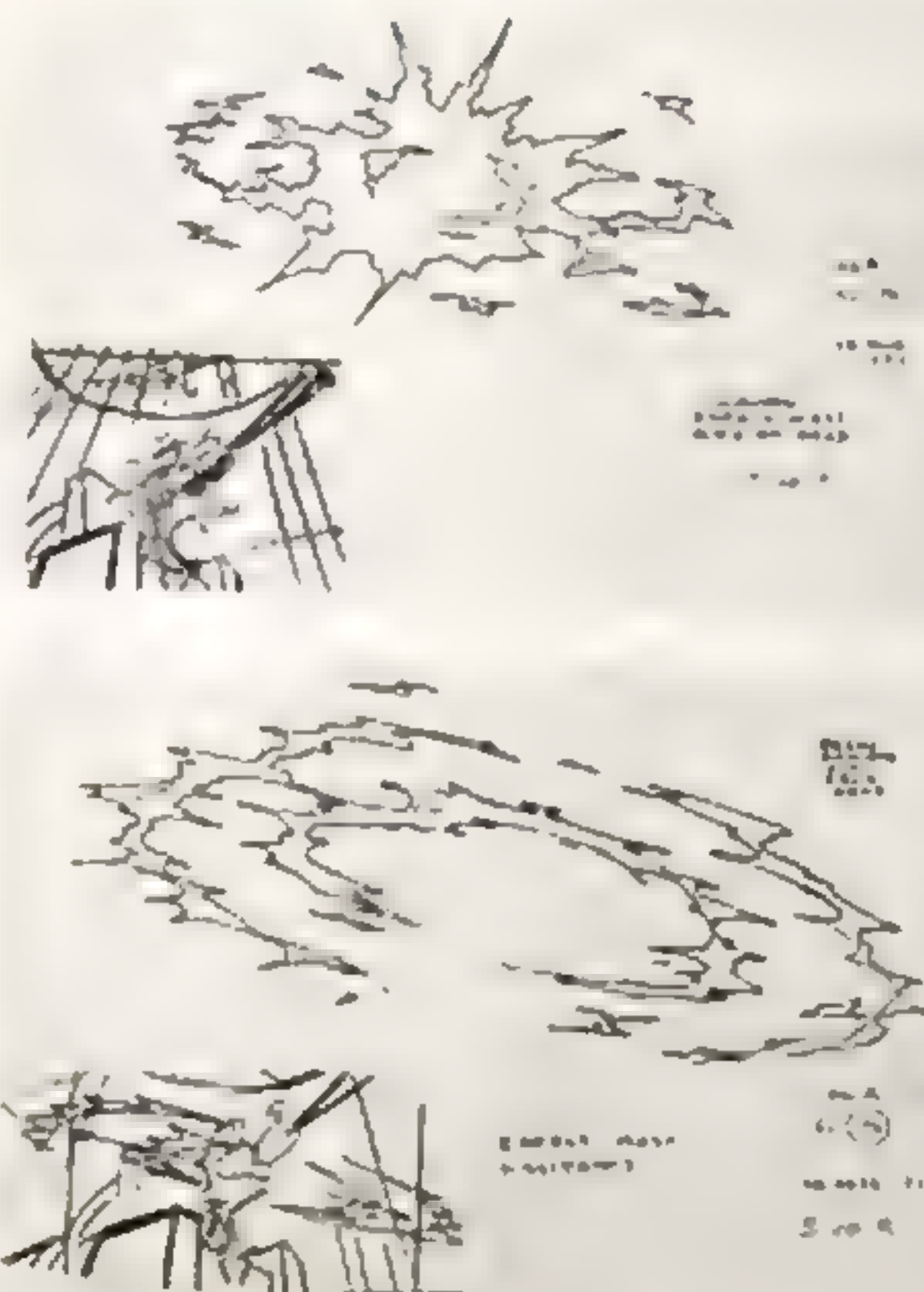


CYCLE (②→③→④→⑤) 2x's  
 CHAS (③④⑤) 2 times  
 4x  
 BLUE FX  
 - (CONT)  
 - (KID) SLAMS HERZ LARGE HAND INTO THE GROUND  
 - LIGHTNING BOLTS SHOOT OUT

① DIX SHOW FX  
 ② SPH-LA/RANDOM 8° of cam. shake

TABUL BORDERS ARE TV SAFE

112 A (CY)  
 5. SMOKE FROM SANDWICH  
 10. ZIM THROWS UP  
 14. SMOKE FROM ZIM'S HEAD (BLOWN OUT NOSE)  
 15. SMOKE OUT  
 68. Doo noise  
 82. SARA STEAMS (SMOKE OUT) AND PAINT  
 84. PB. GRIND (SQUEEZE)  
 90. KID SMOGGY (STOMACH FROM NOSE)  
 99. SMOGGY BUBBLES (SMOKE) 100. LOW INT. OF SMOKE  
 112. BUBBLE RAYS  
 182. YVES EXPLODE  
 185. CLOAKED SMOGGY (NO. 2) 110  
 192. SPLASH OF WATER



112 B (CY)  
 113 B (CY)  
 114 B (CY)  
 115 B (CY)  
 116 B (CY)  
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KEY:  
 ① BUBBLE RAYS  
 ② SMOGGY BUBBLES  
 ③ SMOGGY BUBBLES  
 ④ SMOGGY BUBBLES  
 ⑤ SMOGGY BUBBLES  
 ⑥ SMOGGY BUBBLES  
 ⑦ SMOGGY BUBBLES  
 ⑧ SMOGGY BUBBLES  
 ⑨ SMOGGY BUBBLES  
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 ㊿ SMOGGY BUBBLES

EFFECTS



**NIETZ**

300000, 100000, 50000, 25000, 12500, 6250, 3125, 1562, 781, 390, 195, 97, 48, 24, 12, 6, 3, 1, 0.5, 0.25, 0.125, 0.0625, 0.03125, 0.015625, 0.0078125, 0.00390625, 0.001953125, 0.0009765625, 0.00048828125, 0.000244140625, 0.0001220703125, 0.00006103515625, 0.000030517578125, 0.0000152587890625, 0.00000762939453125, 0.000003814697265625, 0.0000019073486328125, 0.00000095367431640625, 0.000000476837158203125, 0.0000002384185791015625, 0.00000011920928955078125, 0.000000059604644775390625, 0.0000000298023223876953125, 0.00000001490116119384765625, 0.000000007450580596923828125, 0.0000000037252902984619140625, 0.00000000186264514923095703125, 0.000000000931322574615478515625, 0.0000000004656612873077392578125, 0.00000000023283064365386962890625, 0.000000000116415321826934814453125, 0.0000000000582076609134674072265625, 0.00000000002910383045673370361328125, 0.000000000014551915228366851806640625, 0.0000000000072759576141834259033203125, 0.00000000000363797880709171295166015625, 0.000000000001818989403545856475830078125, 0.0000000000009094947017729282379150390625, 0.00000000000045474735088646411895751953125, 0.000000000000227373675443232059478759765625, 0.0000000000001136868377216160297393798828125, 0.00000000000005684341886080801486968994140625, 0.000000000000028421709430404007434844970703125, 0.0000000000000142108547152020037174224853515625, 0.00000000000000710542735760100185871124267578125, 0.000000000000003552713678800500929355621337890625, 0.0000000000000017763568394002504646778106689453125, 0.00000000000000088817841970012523233890533447265625, 0.000000000000000444089209850062616169452667236328125, 0.0000000000000002220446049250313080847263336181640625, 0.00000000000000011102230246251565404236316680908203125, 0.000000000000000055511151231257827021181583404541015625, 0.0000000000000000277555756156289135105907917022705078125, 0.00000000000000001387778780781445675529539585113525390625, 0.000000000000000006938893903907228377647697925567626953125, 0.0000000000000000034694469519536141888238489627838134765625, 0.00000000000000000173472347597680709441192448139190673828125, 0.000000000000000000867361737988403547205962240695953369140625, 0.0000000000000000004336808689942017736029811203479766845703125, 0.00000000000000000021684043449710088680149056017398834228515625, 0.000000000000000000108420217248550443400745280086994171142578125, 0.0000000000000000000542101086242752217003726400434970855712890625, 0.00000000000000000002710505431213761085018632002174854278564453125, 0.000000000000000000013552527156068805425093160010874271392822265625, 0.0000000000000000000067762635780344027125465800054371356964111328125, 0.00000000000000000000338813178901720135627329000271856784820556640625, 0.000000000000000000001694065894508600678136645001359283924102783203125, 0.0000000000000000000008470329472543003390683225006796419620511916015625, 0.00000000000000000000042351647362715016953416125033982098102559580078125, 0.000000000000000000000211758236813575084767080625169910490512797900390625, 0.0000000000000000000001058791184067875423835403125849552452563989501953125, 0.00000000000000000000005293955920339377119177015629247762262819947509765625, 0.000000000000000000000026469779601696885595885078146238811314099737548828125, 0.0000000000000000000000132348898008494427797925039073119406570498687744140625, 0.00000000000000000000000661744490042472138989625195365597032852493438720703125, 0.000000000000000000000003308722450212360694948125976827985164262467193603515625, 0.0000000000000000000000016543612251061803474740629884139925821312335968017578125, 0.00000000000000000000000082718061255309017373703149420699629106561679840087890625, 0.000000000000000000000000413590306276545086868515747103498145532808399200439453125, 0.0000000000000000000000002067951531382725434342578735517490727664041996002197265625, 0.00000000000000000000000010339757656913627171712893677587453638320209980010986328125, 0.000000000000000000000000051698788284568135858564468387937268191601049900054931640625, 0.0000000000000000000000000258493941422840679292822341939686340958005249500274658203125, 0.00



1945 CHICKEN P. - THE 1st PART  
IN 1945 THE 1st WARRIOR PART

*[Faint handwritten notes at the bottom of the page]*



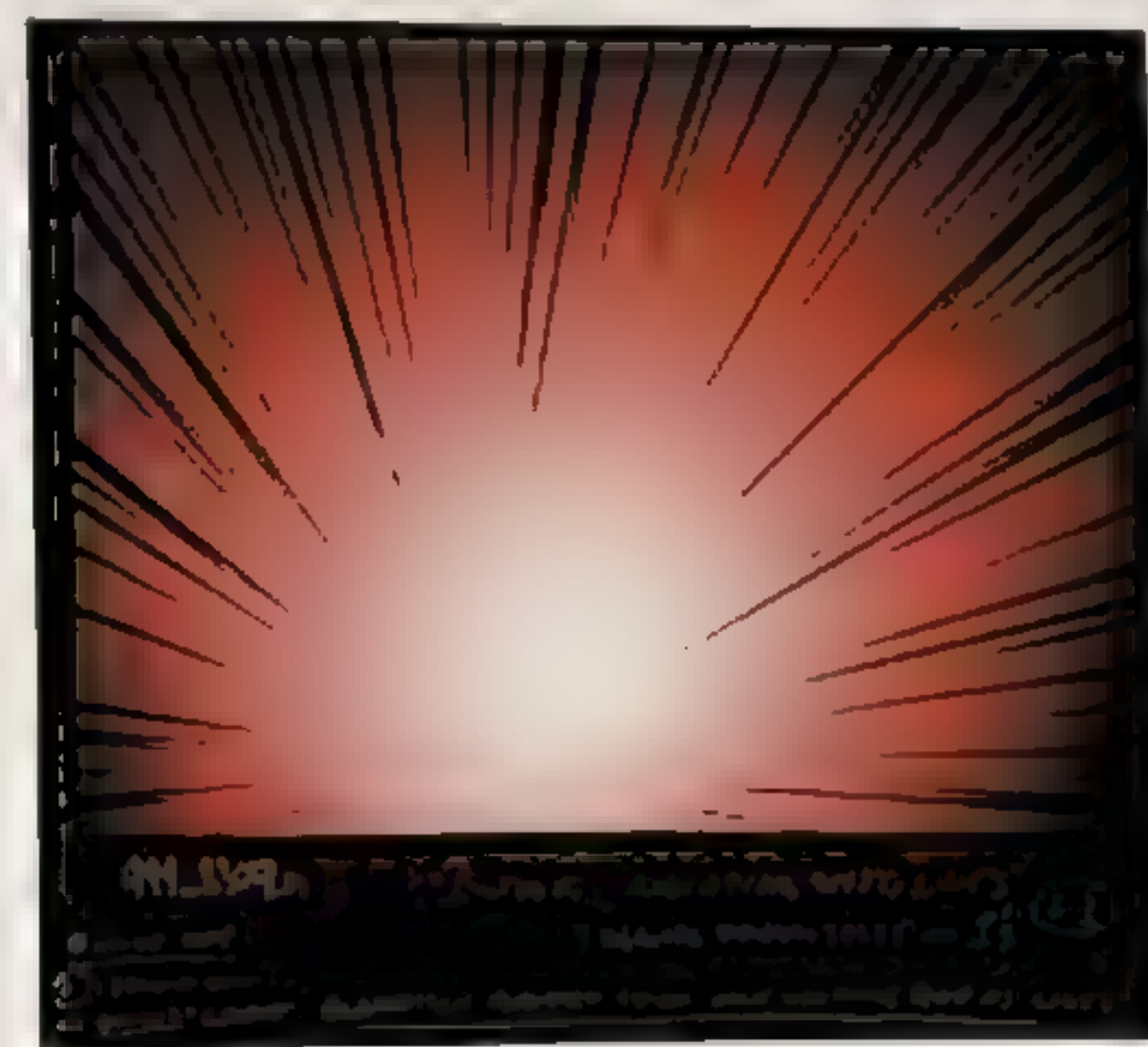
• 1263 - 11/20/2014, LAT TAF 633, 27  
2014 2014 2014, 2014 2014 2014  
2014 2014 2014

222 10 AIRMAIL FORWARD ON BIRMINGHAM I. P. EXPRESSIVE  
WANT TO SEE YOU VERY MUCH

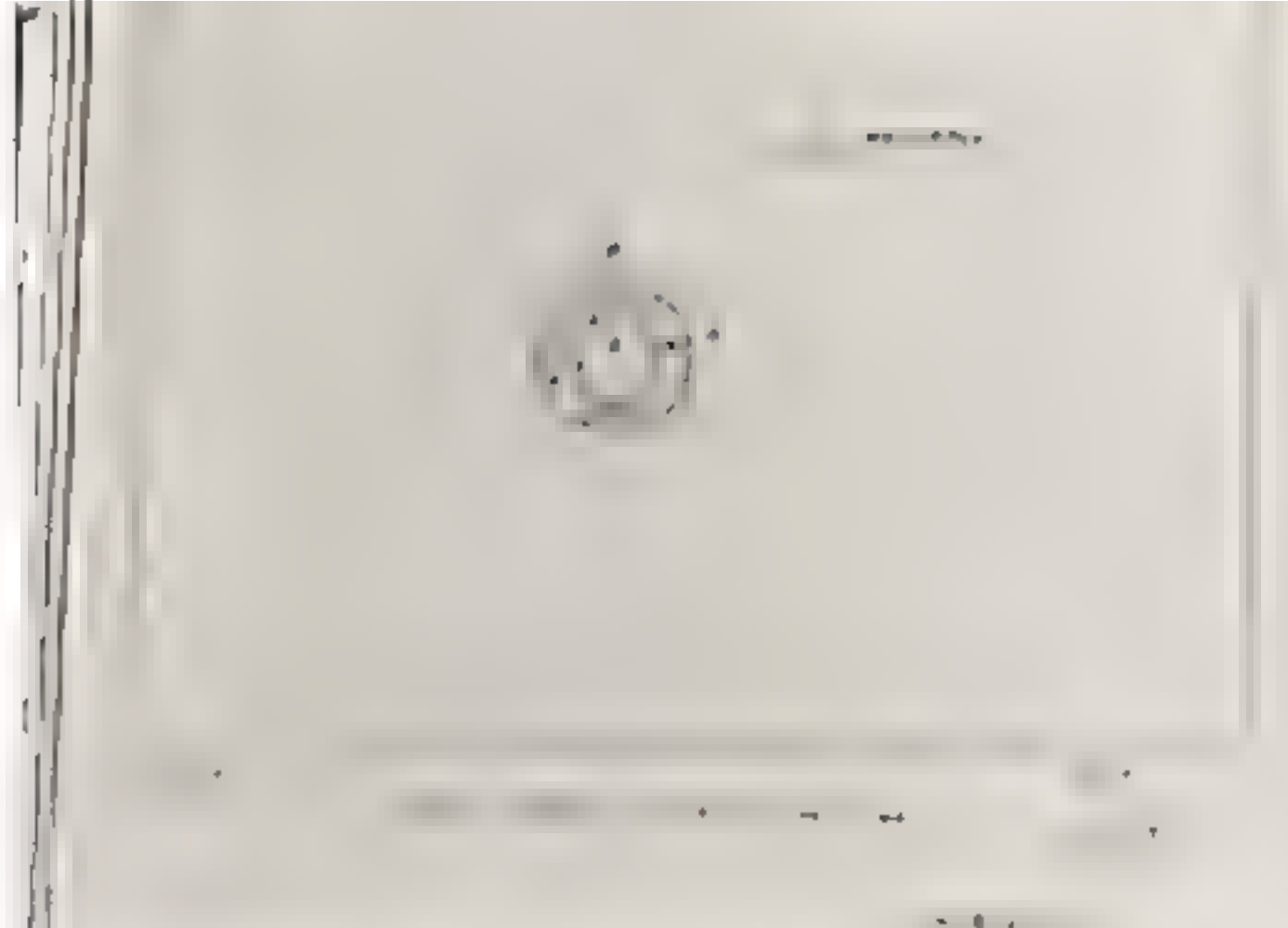
7. 1. 1944 (1944) 1. 1. 1944



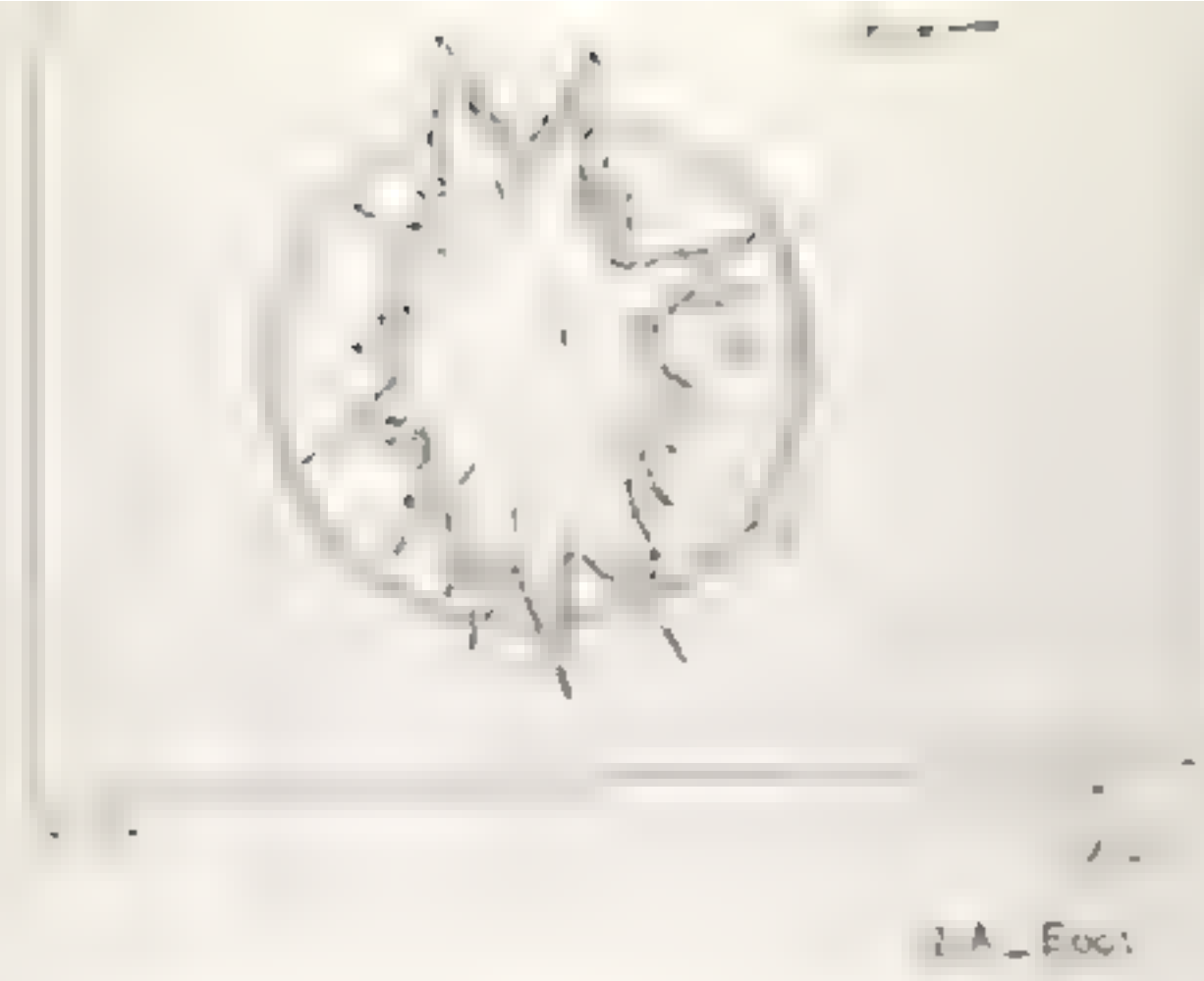
WALTON  
- 7th Ave.  
L.A. 5-50



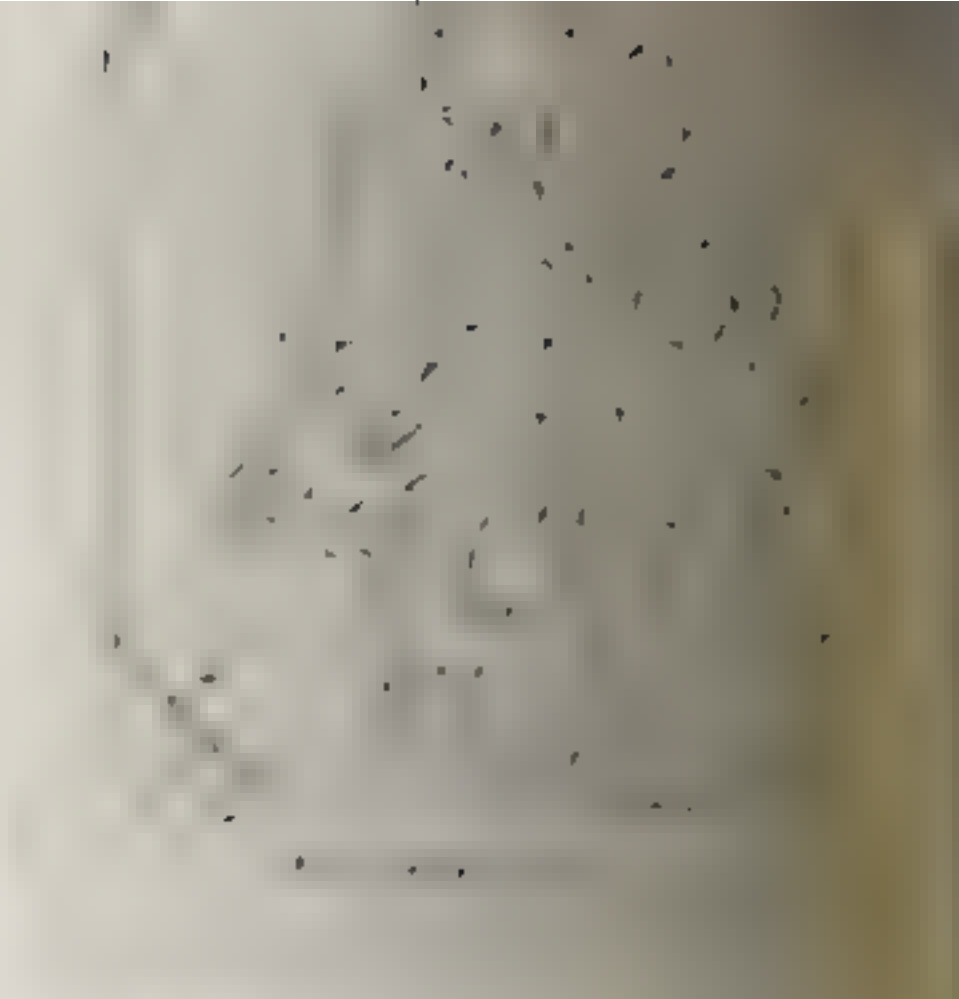




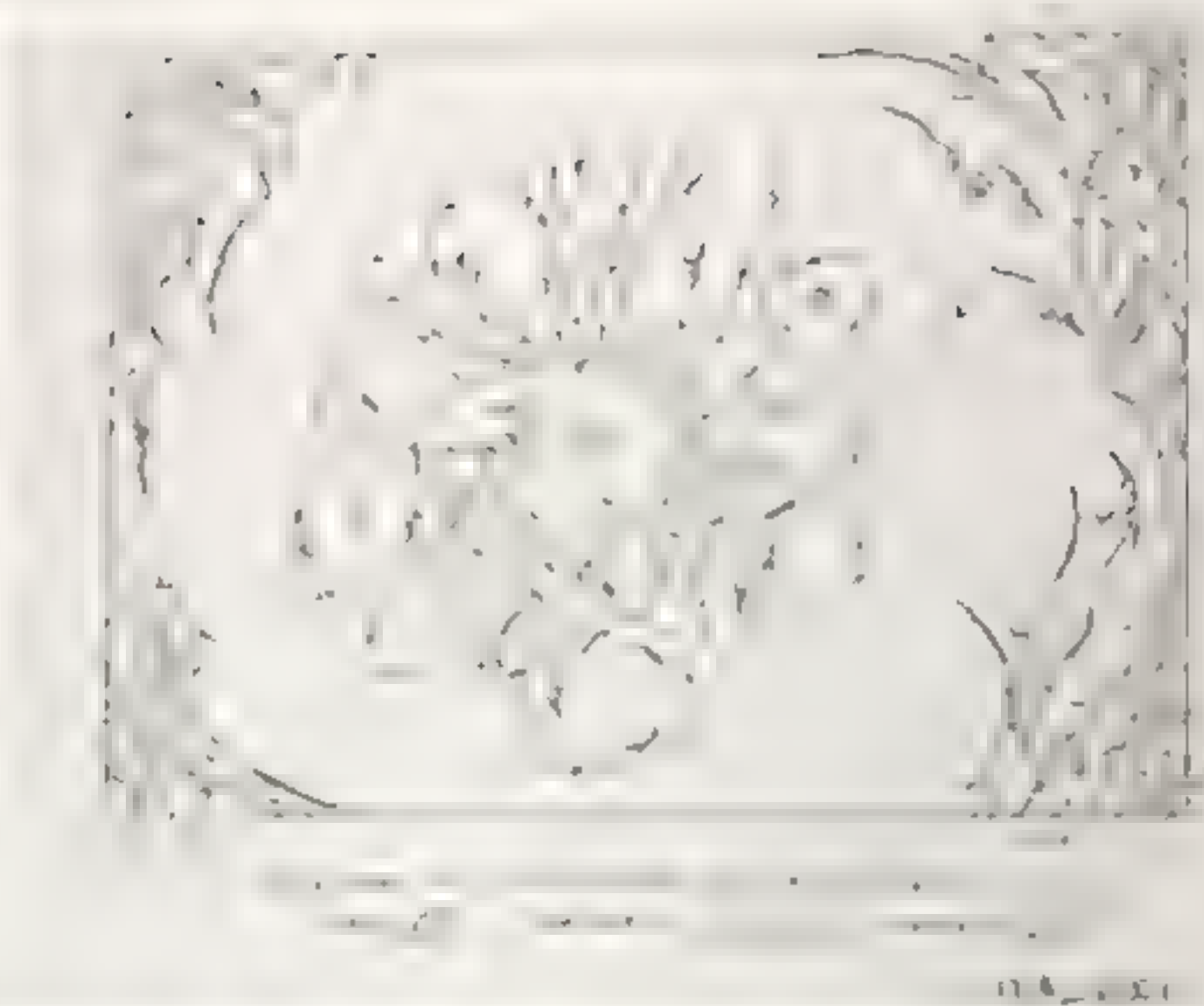
1A-100



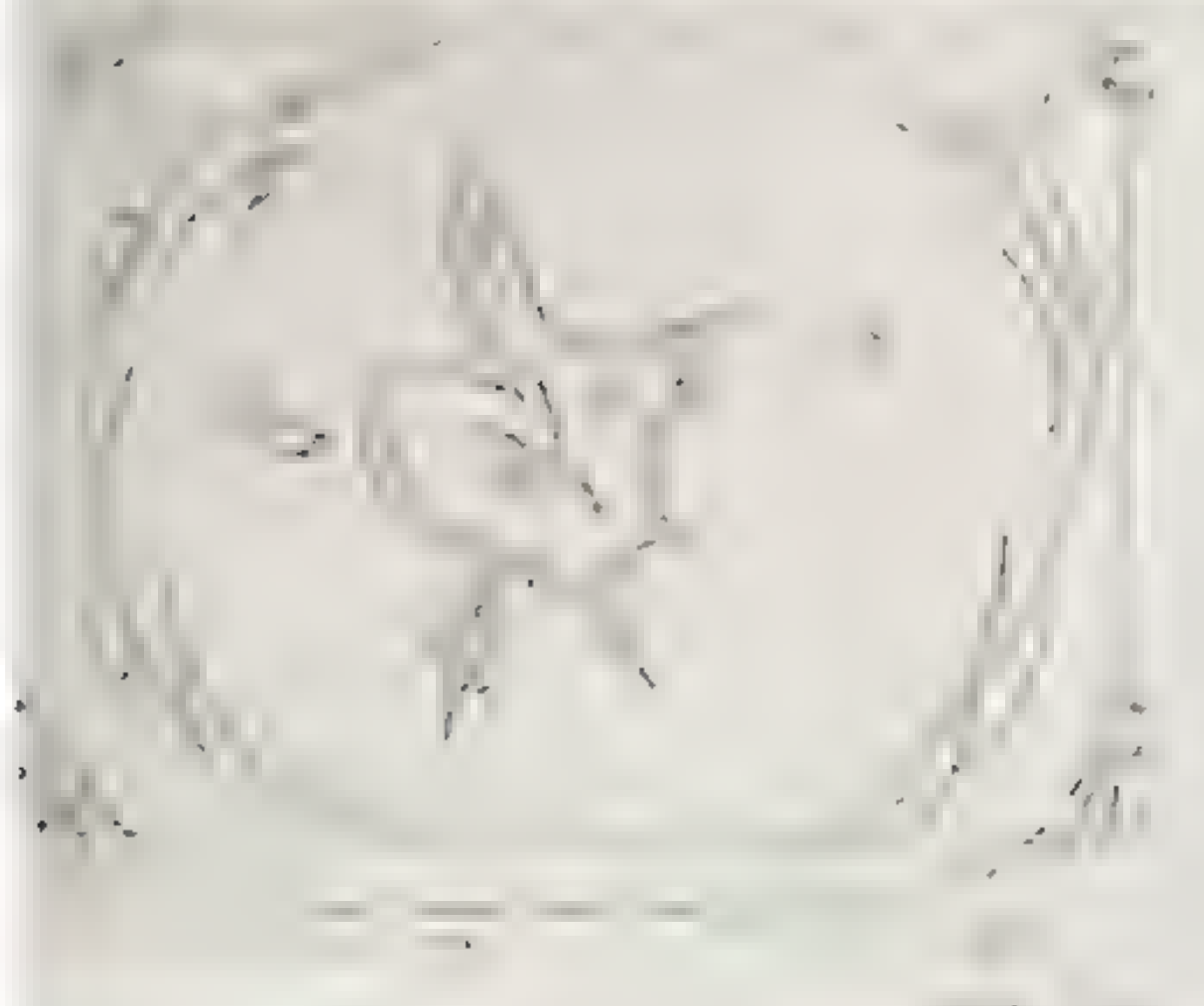
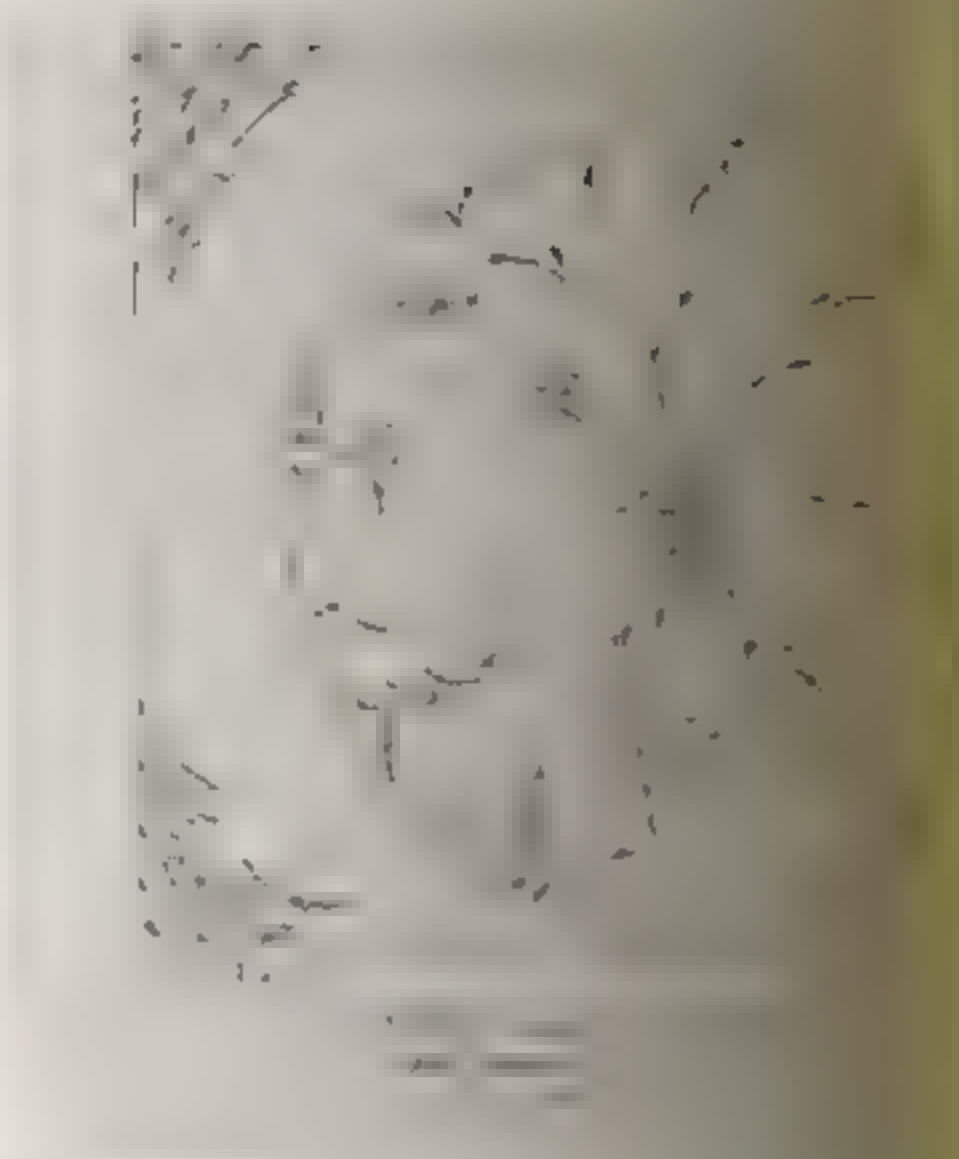
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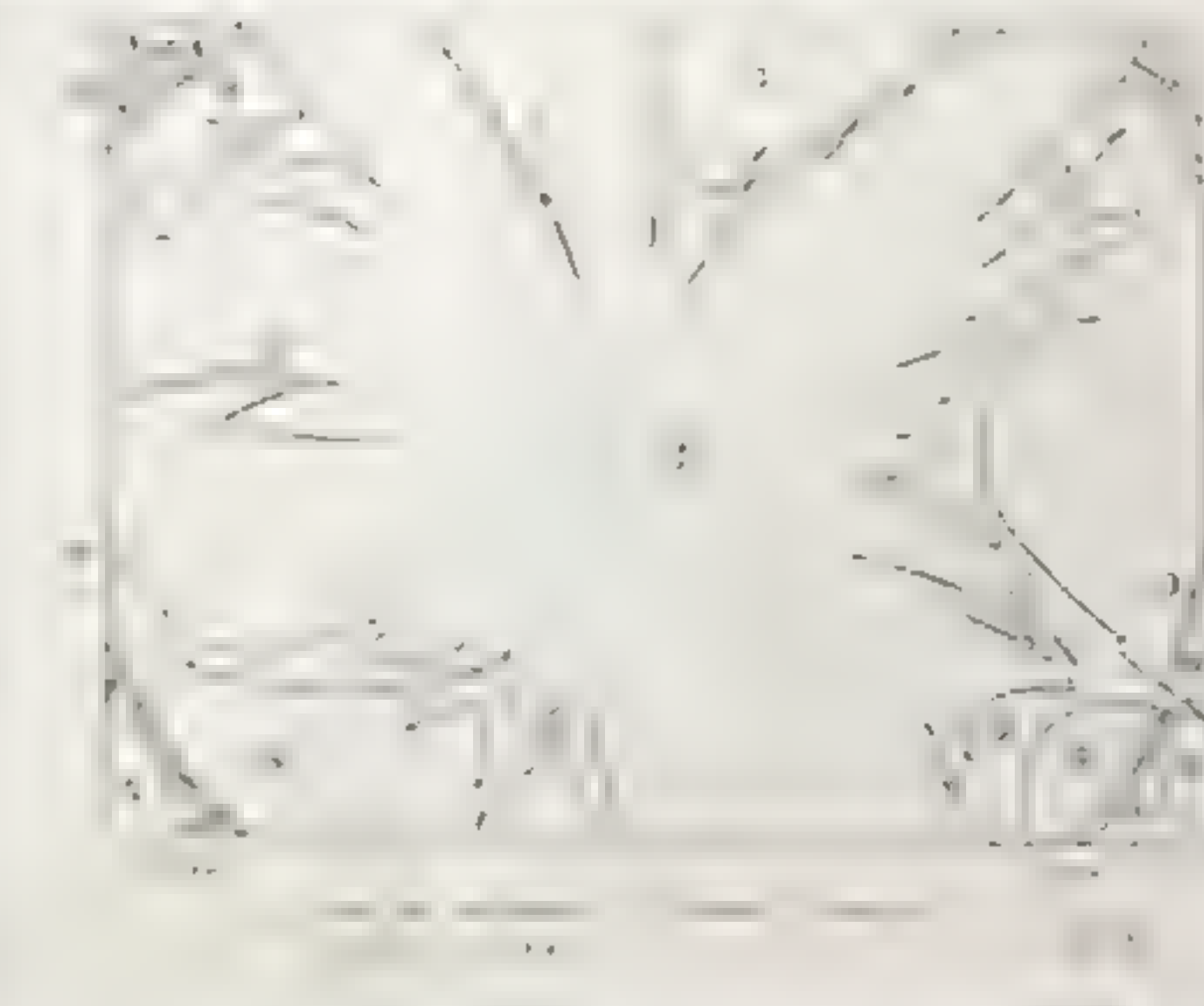
1A-100



1A-100



1A-100



1A-100



EFFECTS



1. D.D. MORTALITY

2. SEE FOLLOW THESE LAYOUTS IN FINAL ANIMATION VERY CLOSELY!!!

SELFING, BACKLIT GLOW

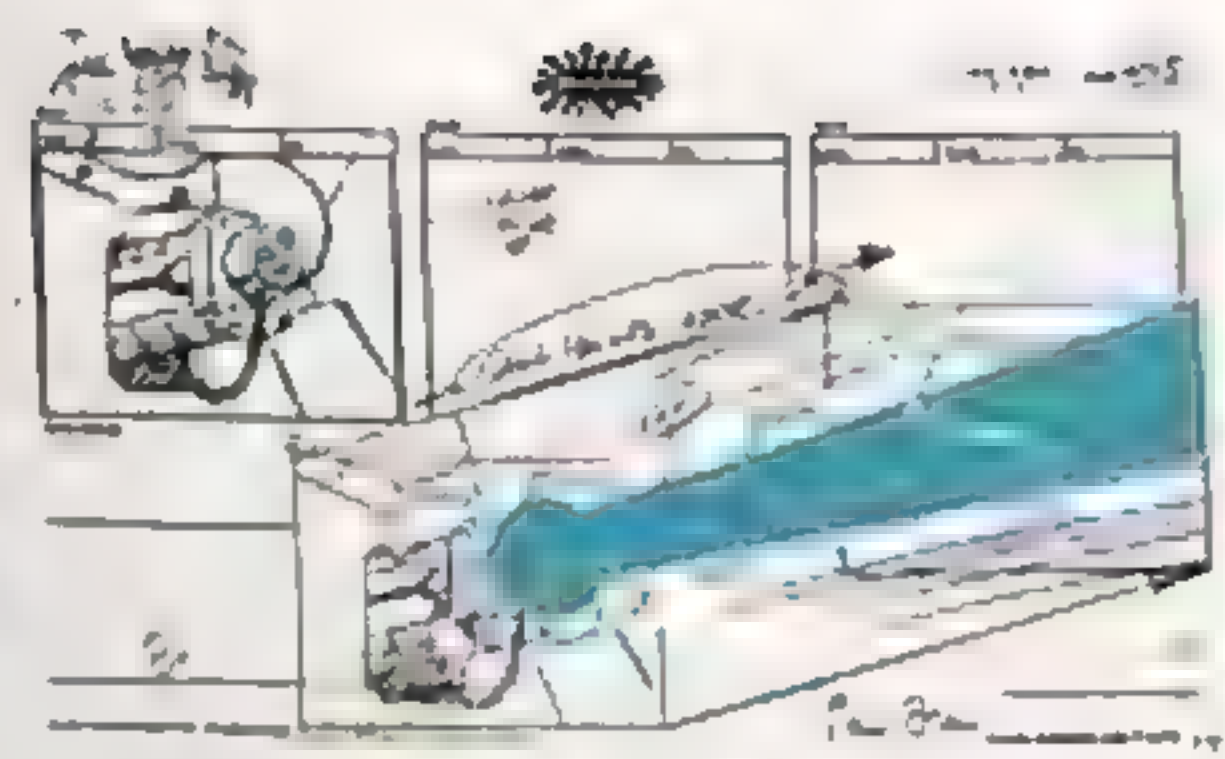
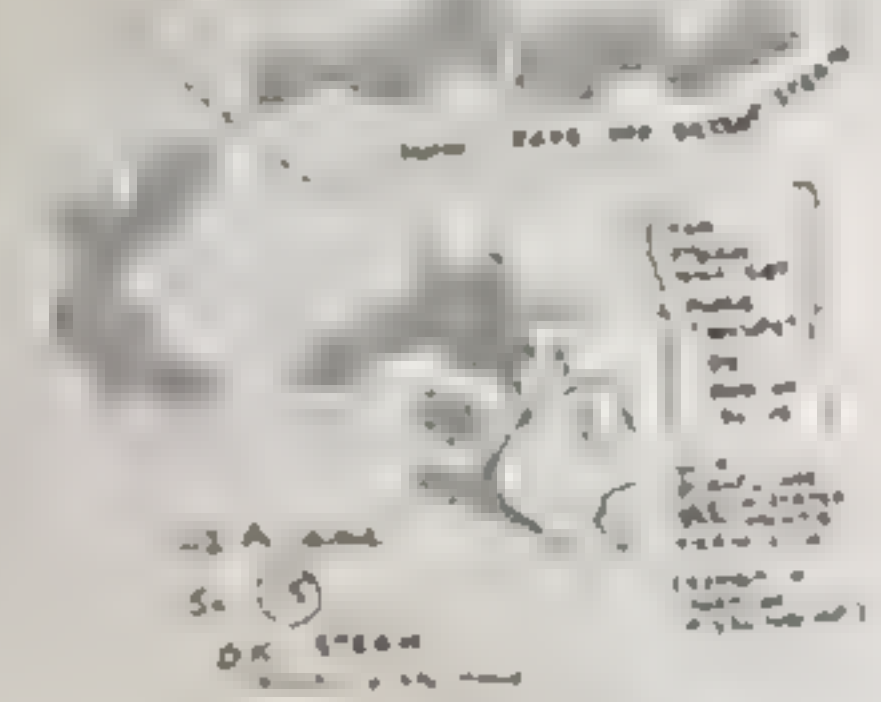
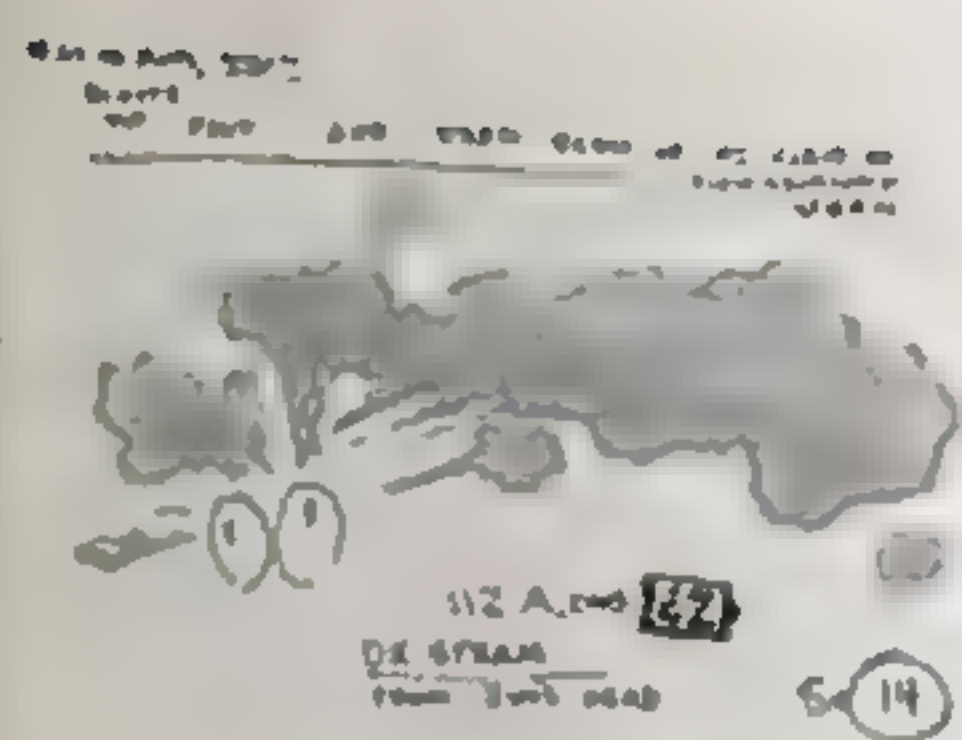
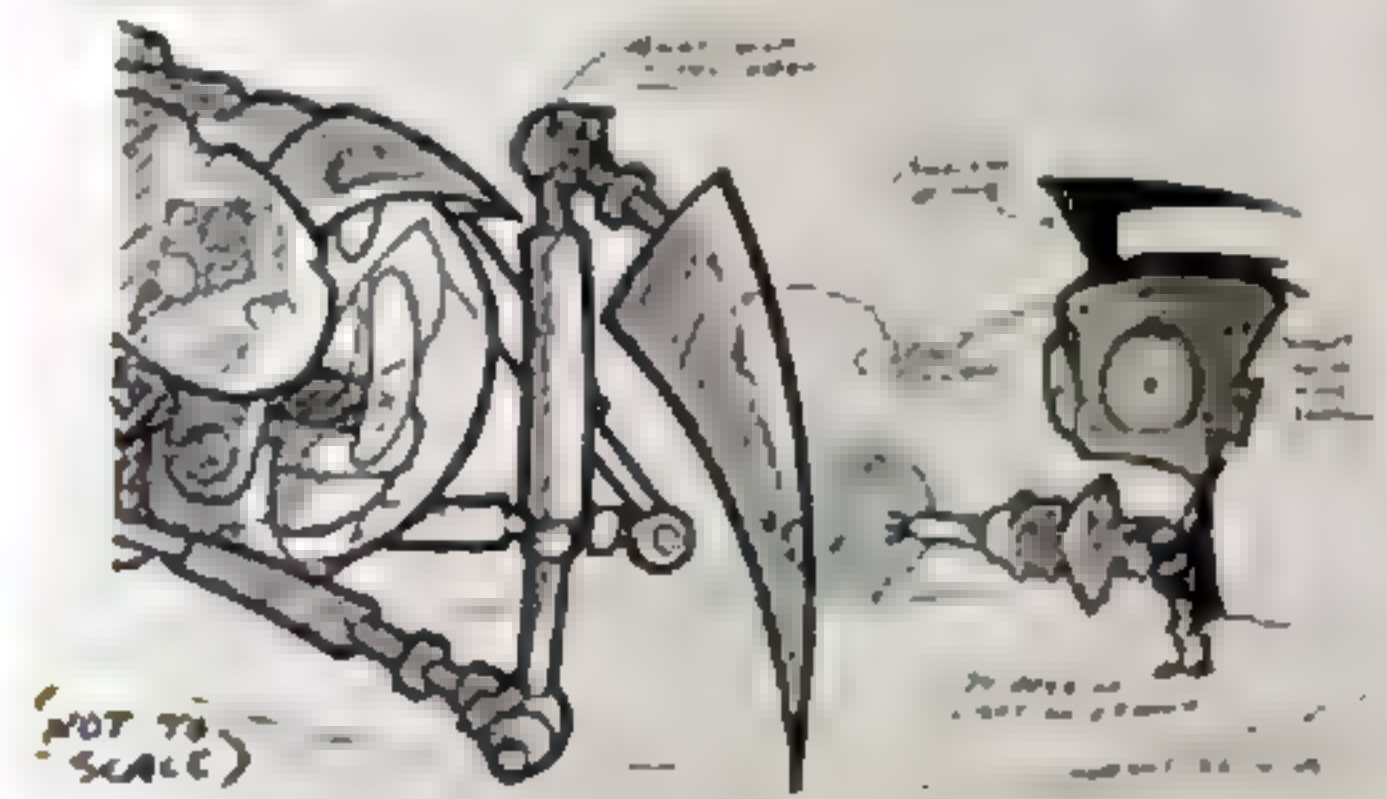
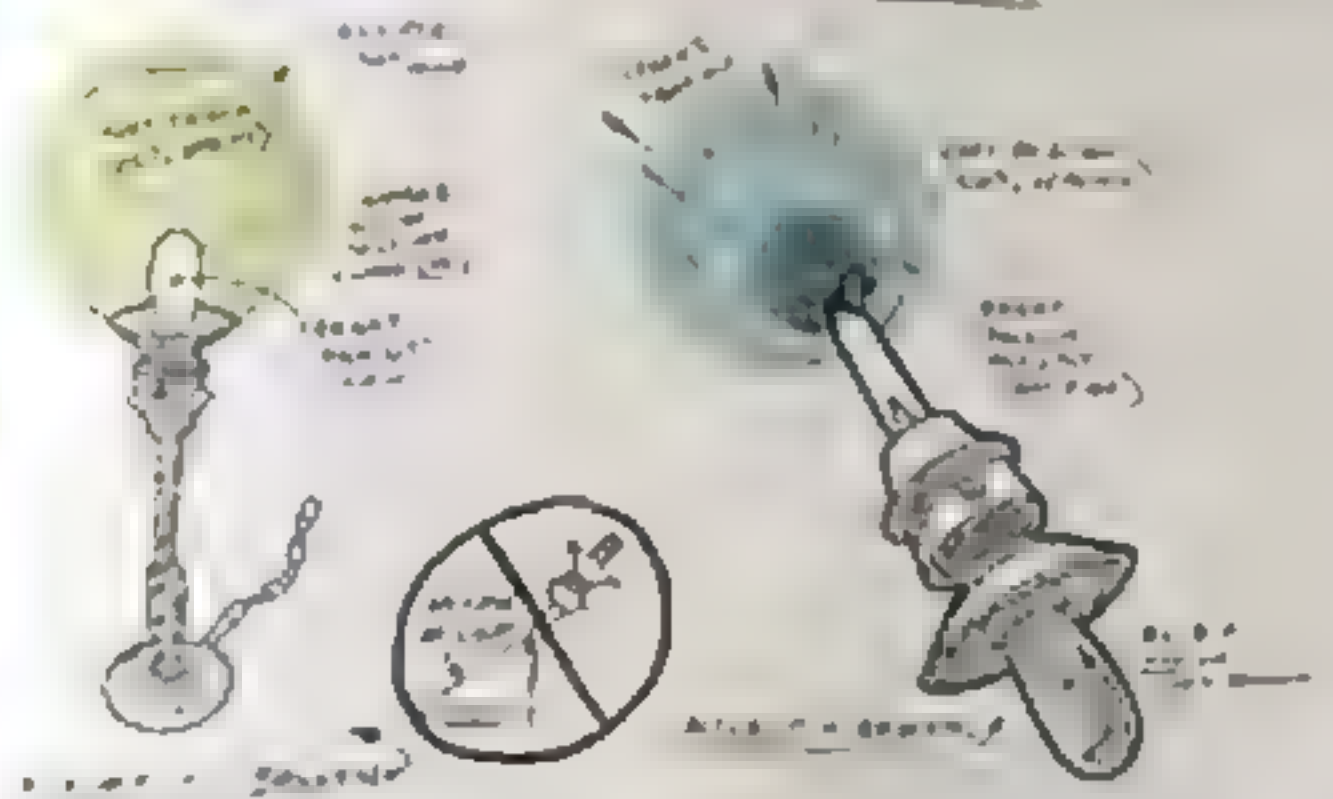
- 1. HOT WHITE
- 2. LIGHT YELLOW
- 3. YELLOW

FOR SURROUNDING LIGHT ORANGE

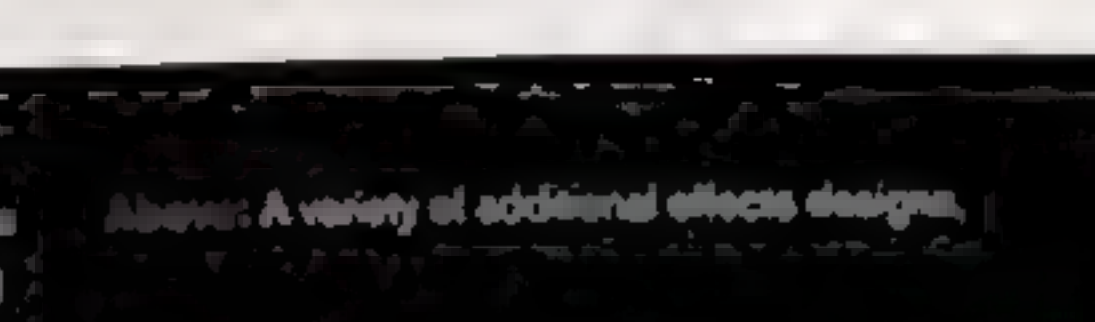
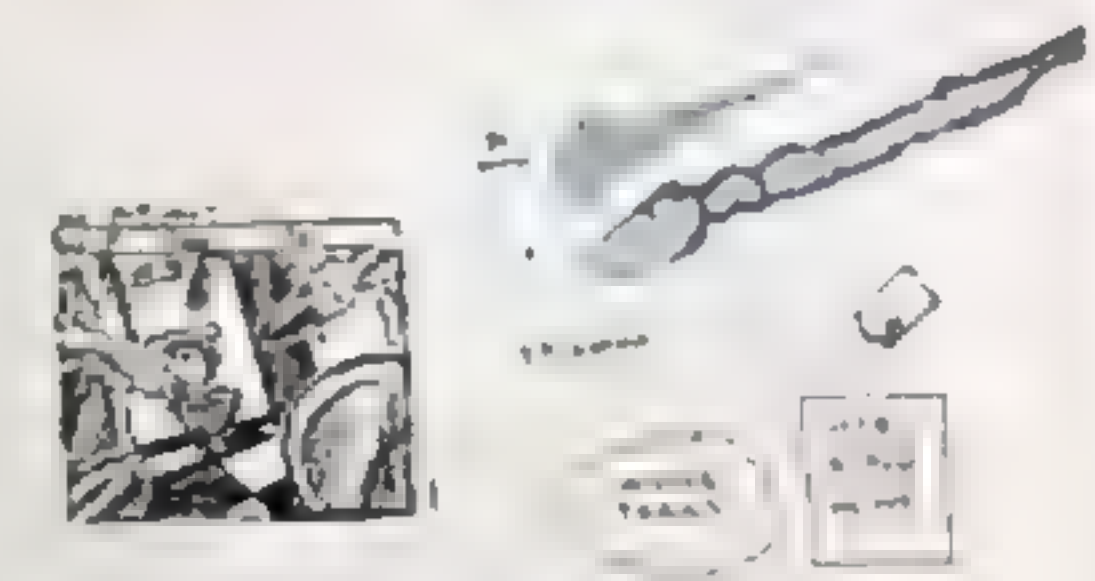
ORANGE

DARK RED

1248 "DOWNT" 1248 E001 320  
LIGHTING CODE FOR "OUTDOOR LAMP" **SNY24**



DIALOGUE



Opposite: A series of 2-D effects layout drawings from the episode "Backseat Drivers from Beyond the Stars" (EP21), and notes above detailing the

intended colors of its components. The final colors in the episode (see stills above left) did not reflect the red and darker red from the original plan.

Above: A variety of additional effects designs.

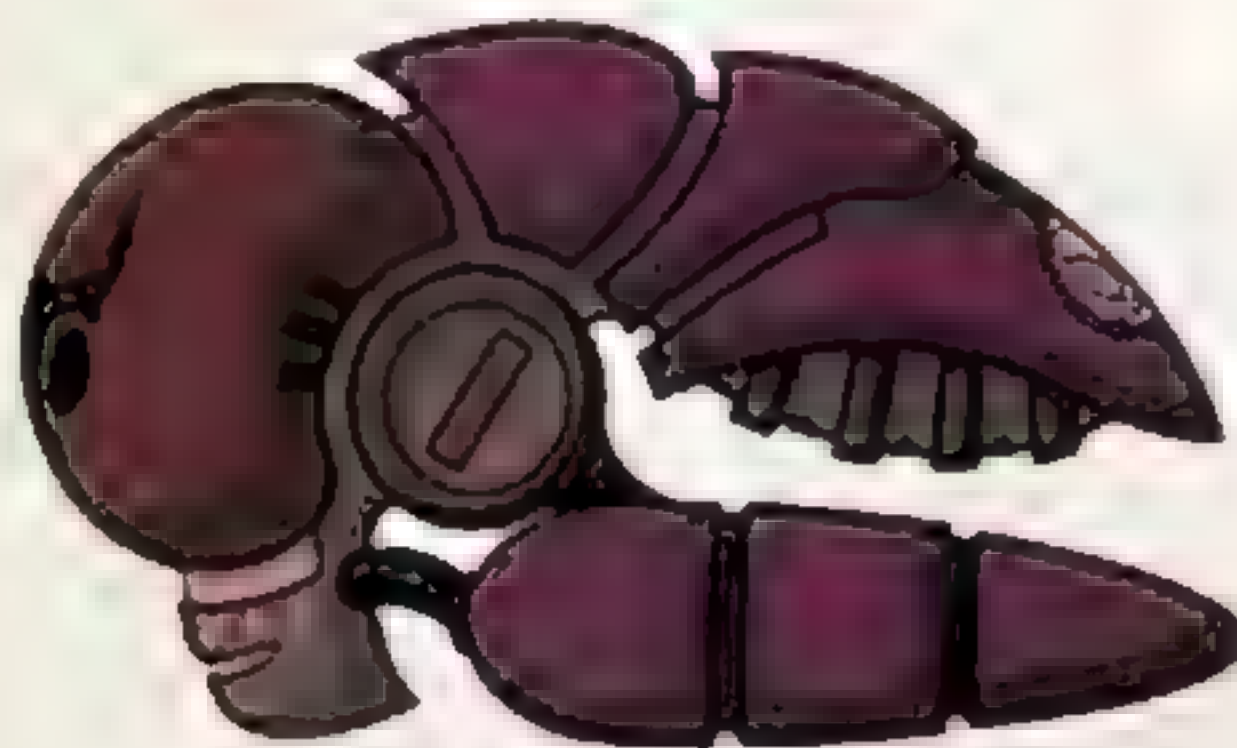


# PROPS

Many of the ships and scene elements in outer space were modeled and animated in 3-D in what was a relatively new process for Nickelodeon at the time of the *Zim* production. Other elements including the ubiquitous telescoping tubes of Irken technology were also often animated in 3-D and "toon shaded" to achieve and blend with the flat color look of traditional cartoon animation. It was another extension of the enthusiasm and ambition behind the series, and a complicating factor in the production schedule and budget.

**Ian Graham (storyboard artist):** We kind of did it in reverse and this may have had something to do with the unsustainable budget. We weren't given a limit or any specific guidance on the 3-D, just that we had some 3-D that we could play with and could do some 3-D shots. We had an internal 3-D team which is really rare, John Sore and Hanzhi Tang. (these guys have all moved on to ILM and WETA

and that kind of stuff), really talented guys, and they just tried to make it work. We were allowed to communicate with them, which was also rare as storyboard artists. Usually these areas are separate and the supervisors oversee it all. But on *Zim*, they would come to us, or we would go to them, chitchat, and go "ooh it would be cool if we did this," because they were as excited as we were. We knew the limitations of what we could or couldn't do, but we didn't have an amount that we were limited to using. It wasn't like we were told "you have fifteen shots, that's it, so use them smart." So we would just get into a sequence and be like "oh yeah this is going to be all CG stuff!" It was a lot of fun but it probably pushed the budget up a lot. Steve Ressel and Jhonen had a lot to do with it too, they were in there every day just as excited and looking at what the CG guys were doing.



P0001A-VIRAL TANK



**This spread:** Some designs that were translated into 3-D, and some that include work from the CG team. Bryan Kozlowski: "I always loved the Irken

tech aesthetic, which looked very organic and insectoid, but also sort of bloopy. I remember Jhonen would often design things in profile

especially space ships. I thought John Sore and the CG team did a great job translating those into 3-D, achieving that cool/gooey balance."





1999

**PROP**  
**ALIEN SHIP**

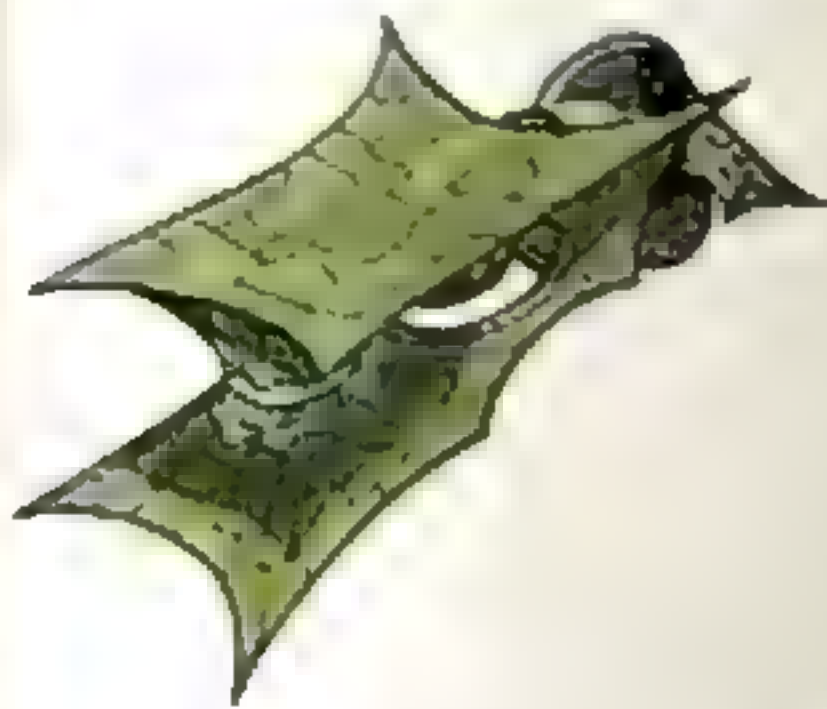
126a

REVISÉD

123

[illegible]

伊達忠房 16 歳



POLO TAKES SHIP

**PROP**

**ALIEN SHIP**

243

126a

1997-1998

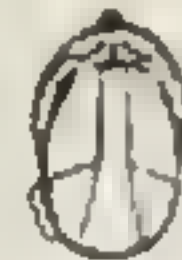
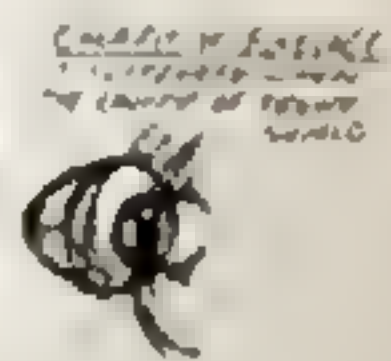
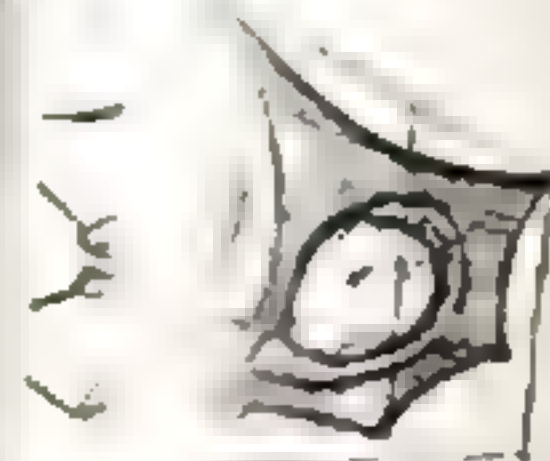
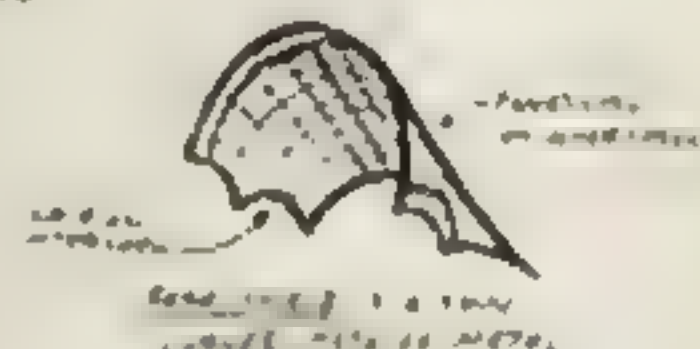
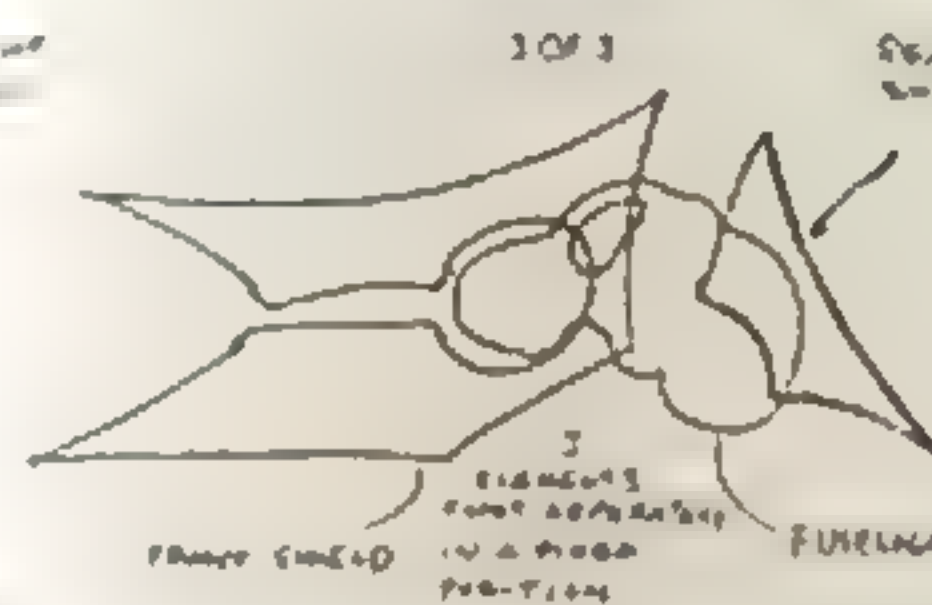


WHITE = GRID LINES  
AND FOR SHAPE  
REFERENCE  
REFER TO CLEAN UP  
FOR DETAIL

**PROP**

**ALIEN SHIP**

126a

[illegible]

FRANK  
FUSCO

PROFILE  
PROFILE

## Background



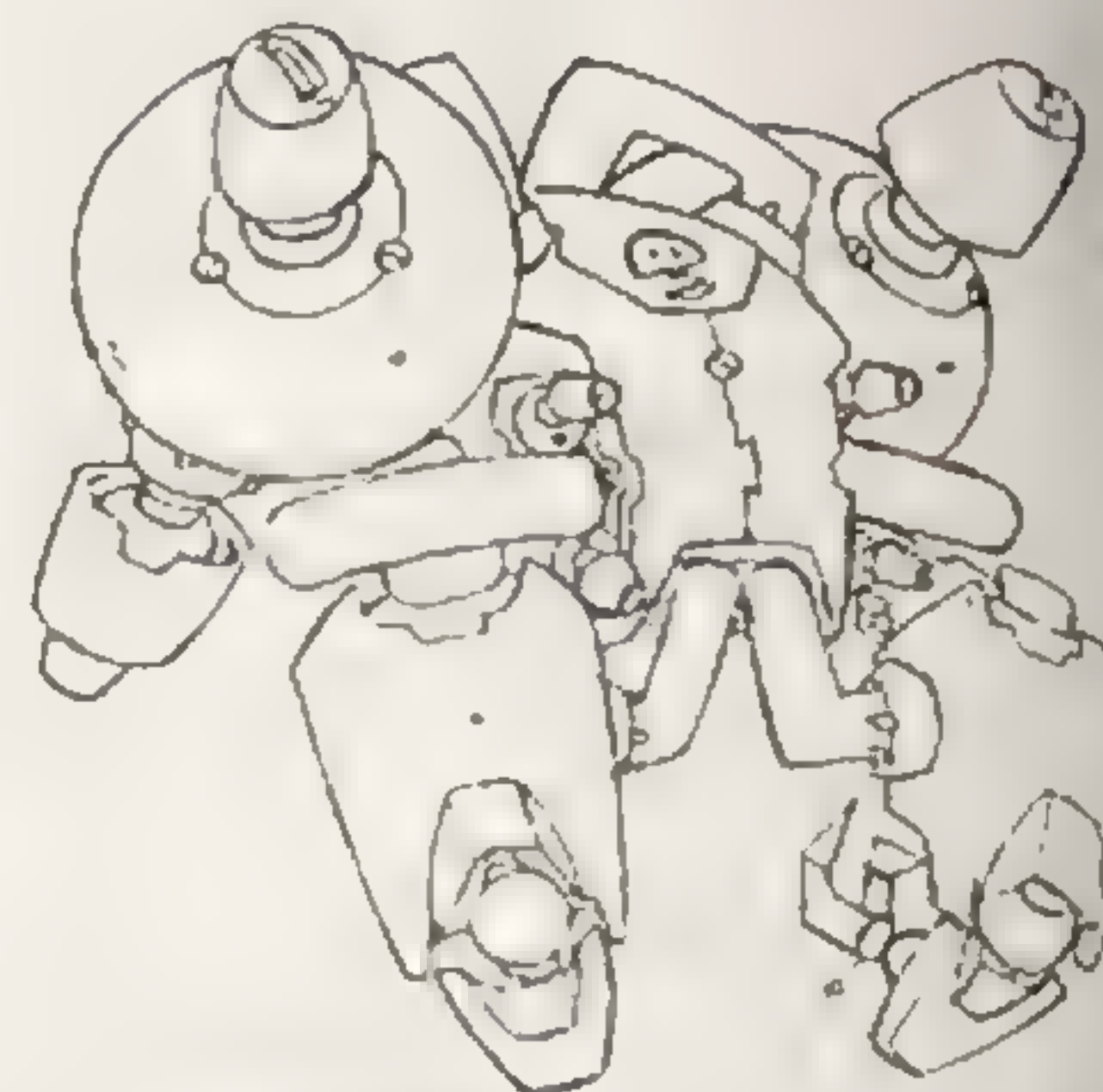
EXCISE TAXES



INVADER ZIM	TITLE	THE TRIAL	DATE	10-26-01	ARTIST	WONG
ORBITAL LASER ERAY						
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div></div> <div>NIETZ</div> <div>PROP MODEL</div> </div>						



INVADER ZIM	TITLE	THE TRIAL	DATE	10/30/01	ARTIST	
SECURITY PROID						
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div>128 -</div> <div>NIETZ</div> <div>PROP MODEL</div> </div>						



(CHECK SKETCH FOR 128)

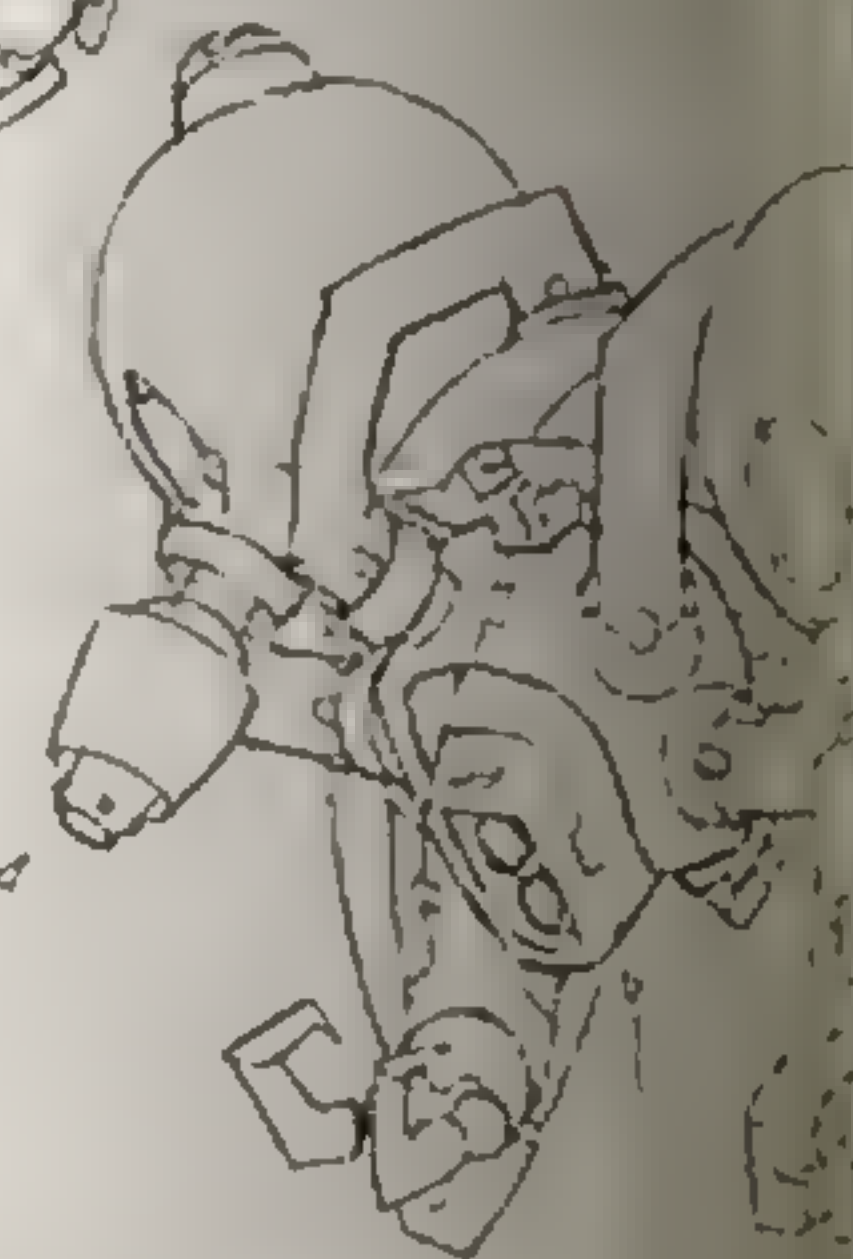
FRONT

BACK

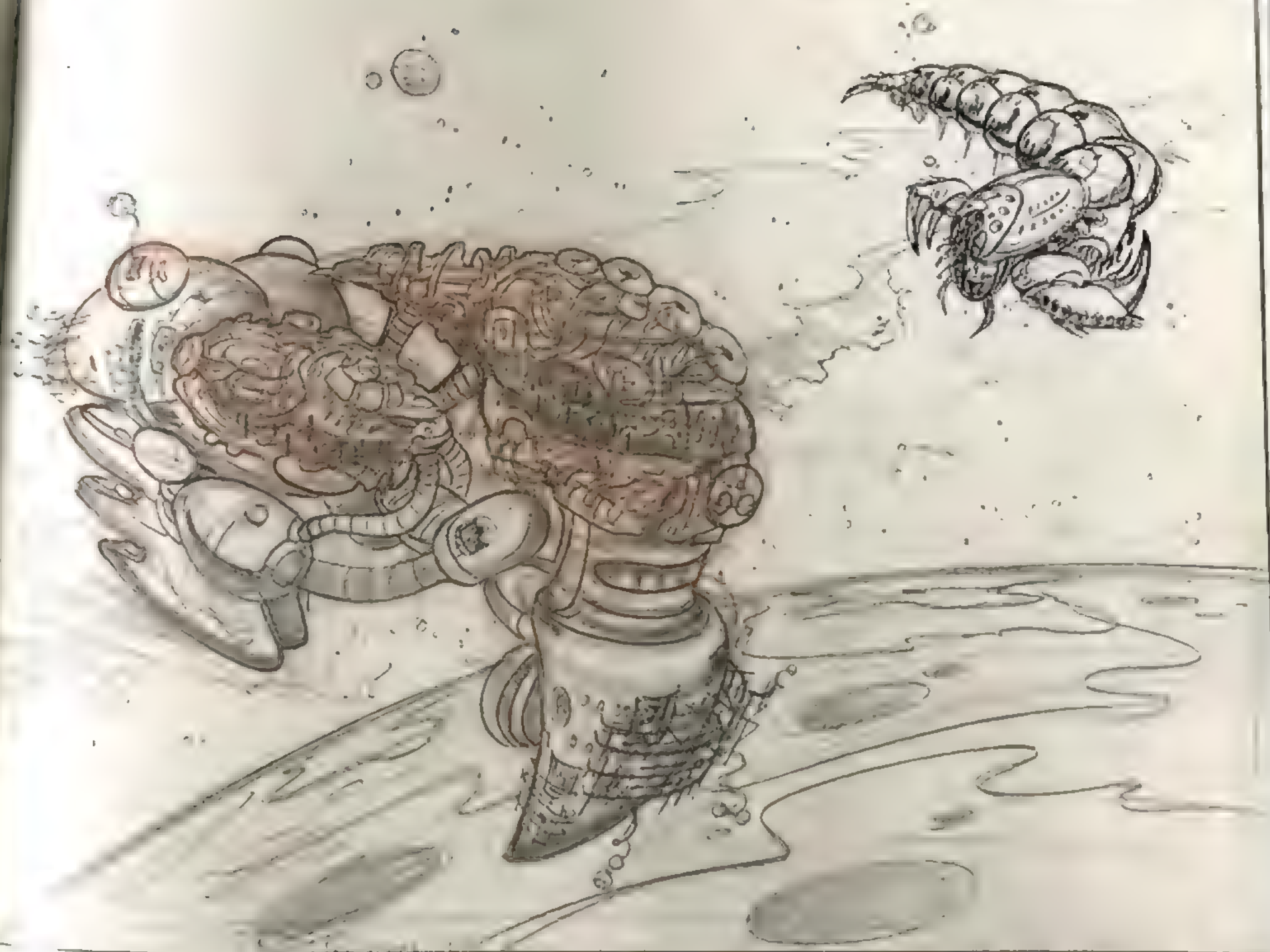
FINGERS FLOAT

LEVITATION ENGINE HAS OR GLOW

OR GLOW ON SURFACE







ENEMY 128

128 TRIAL PLANT - THE ALIVE  
 FILE TRENDING CAMP 4  
 ORBITING BARRAGE

This spread: Designs from the unfinished episode "The Trial" Opposite are prop designs

by Jeff Wong and Eric Lloyd Brown. Above is a layout design by Spencer Q. Davis.

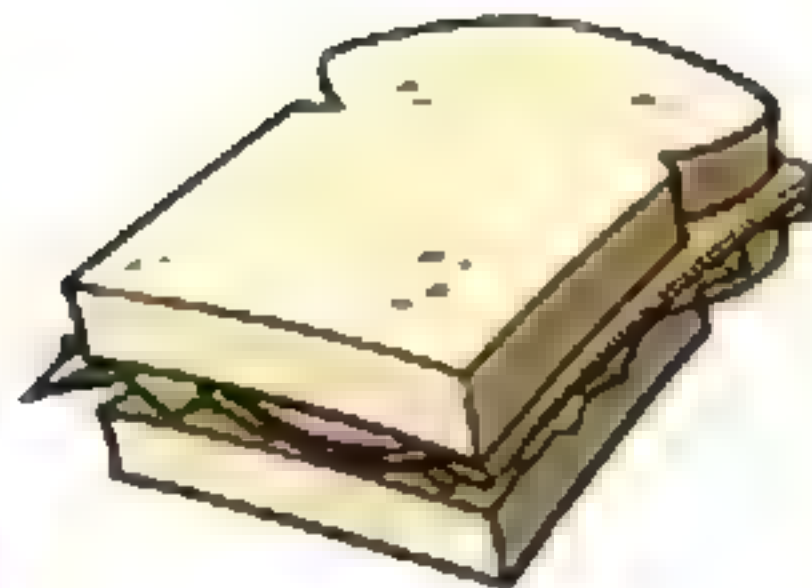




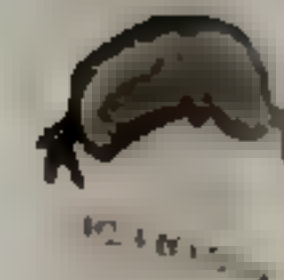
P005 MILK CARTON



P002 SMALL BUNNEN



P001 CAN OF TRODNEY BEANS



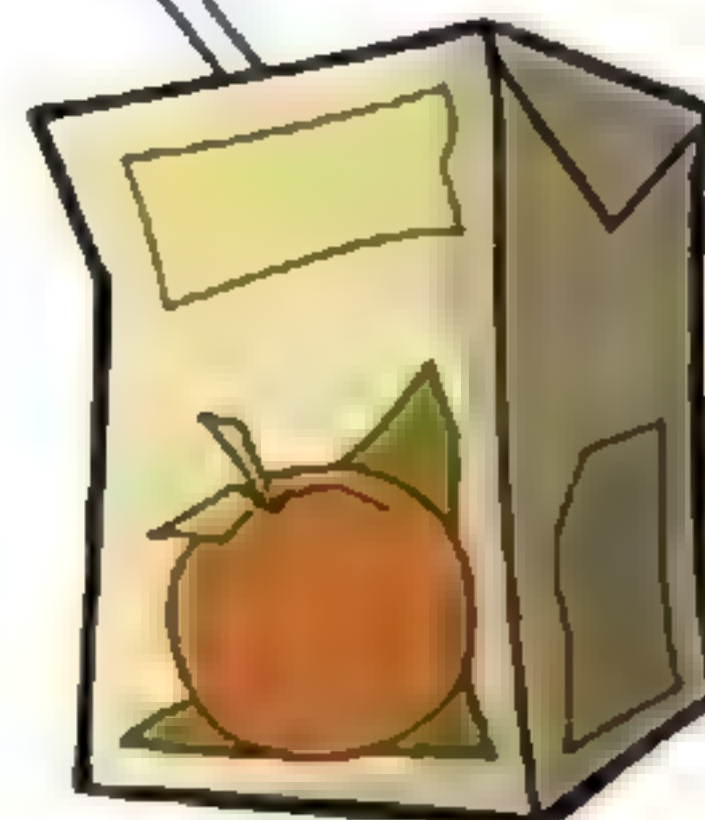
P004 BUNNEN



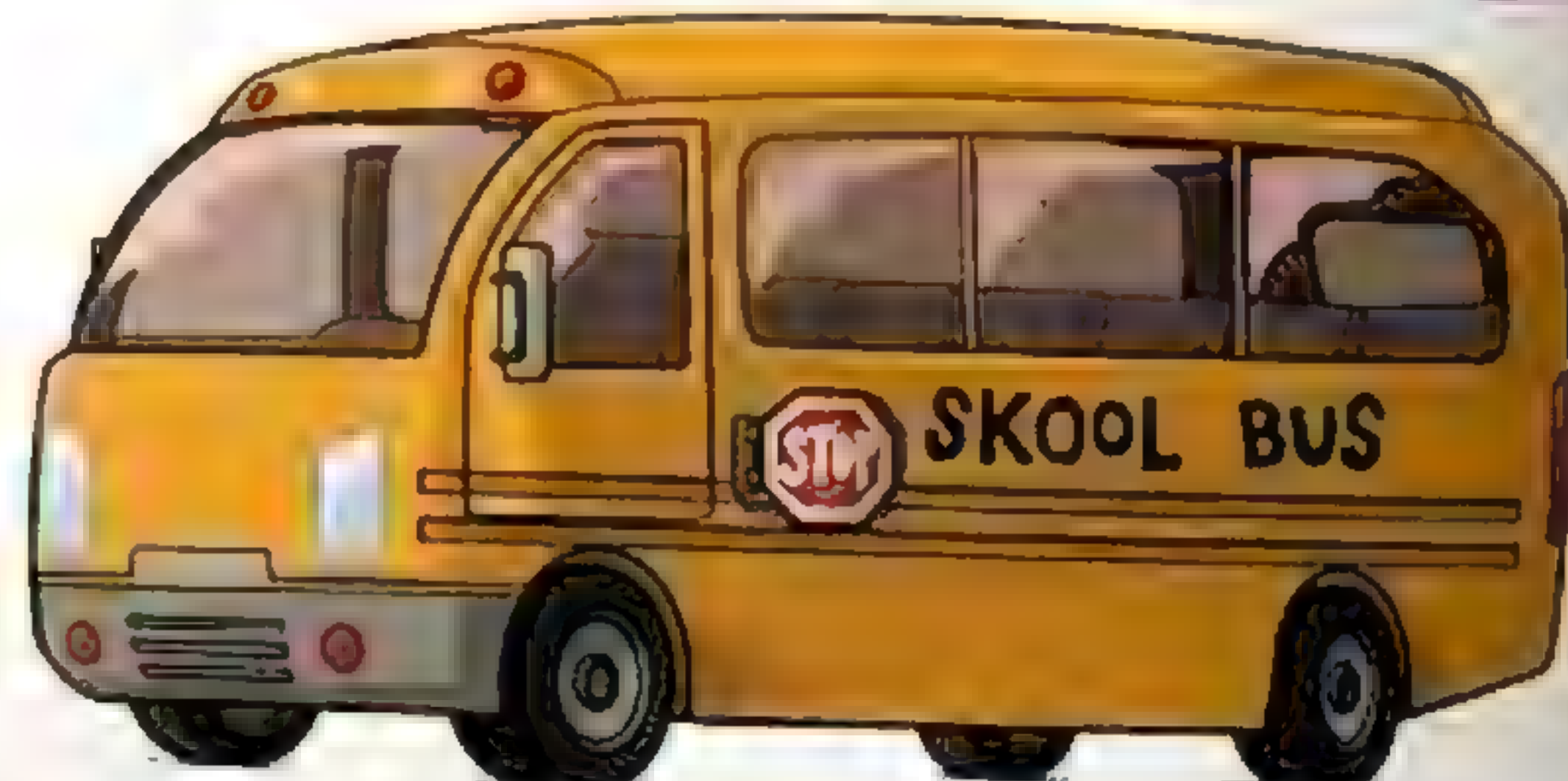
P002 TURKEY



P021 POOP BBQ SAUCE



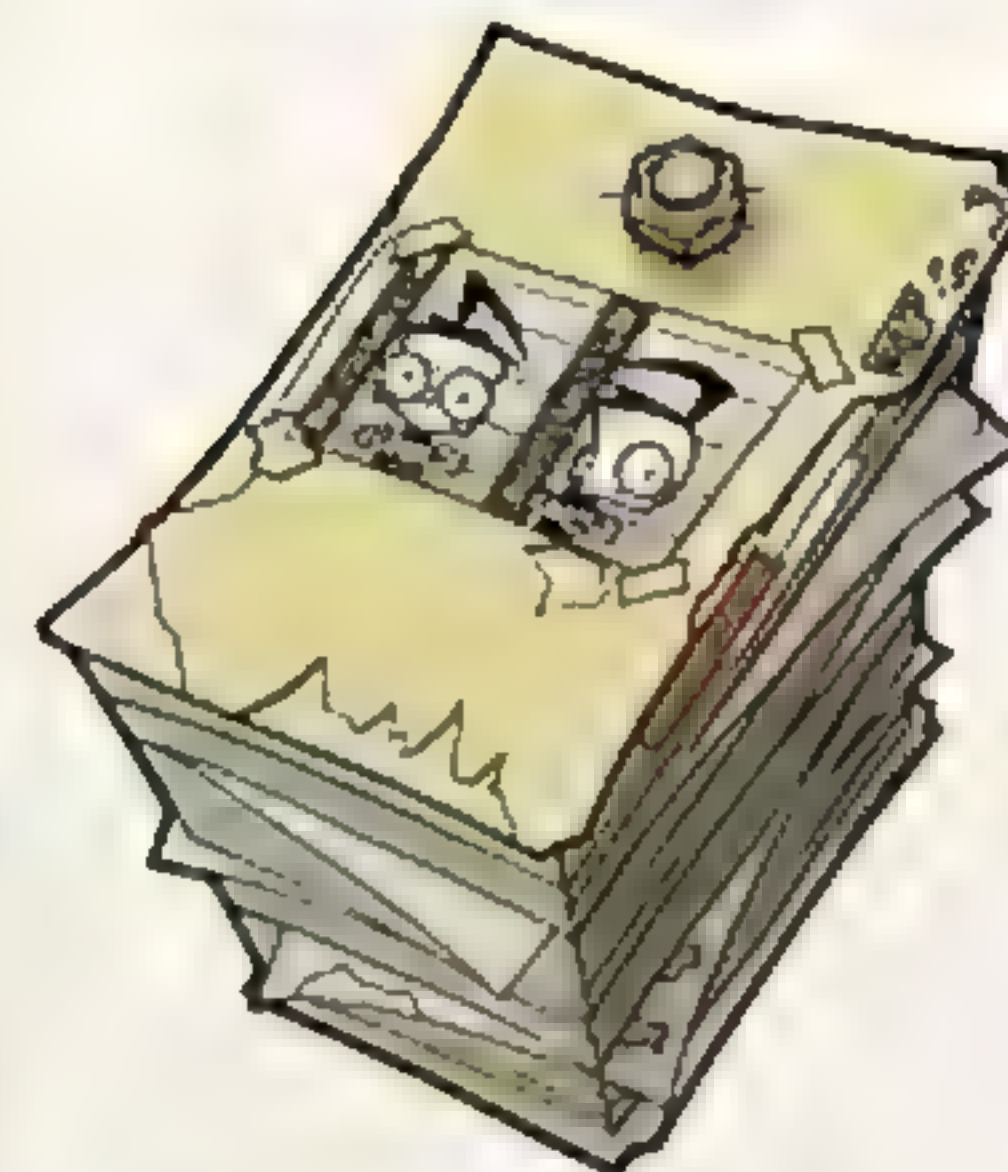
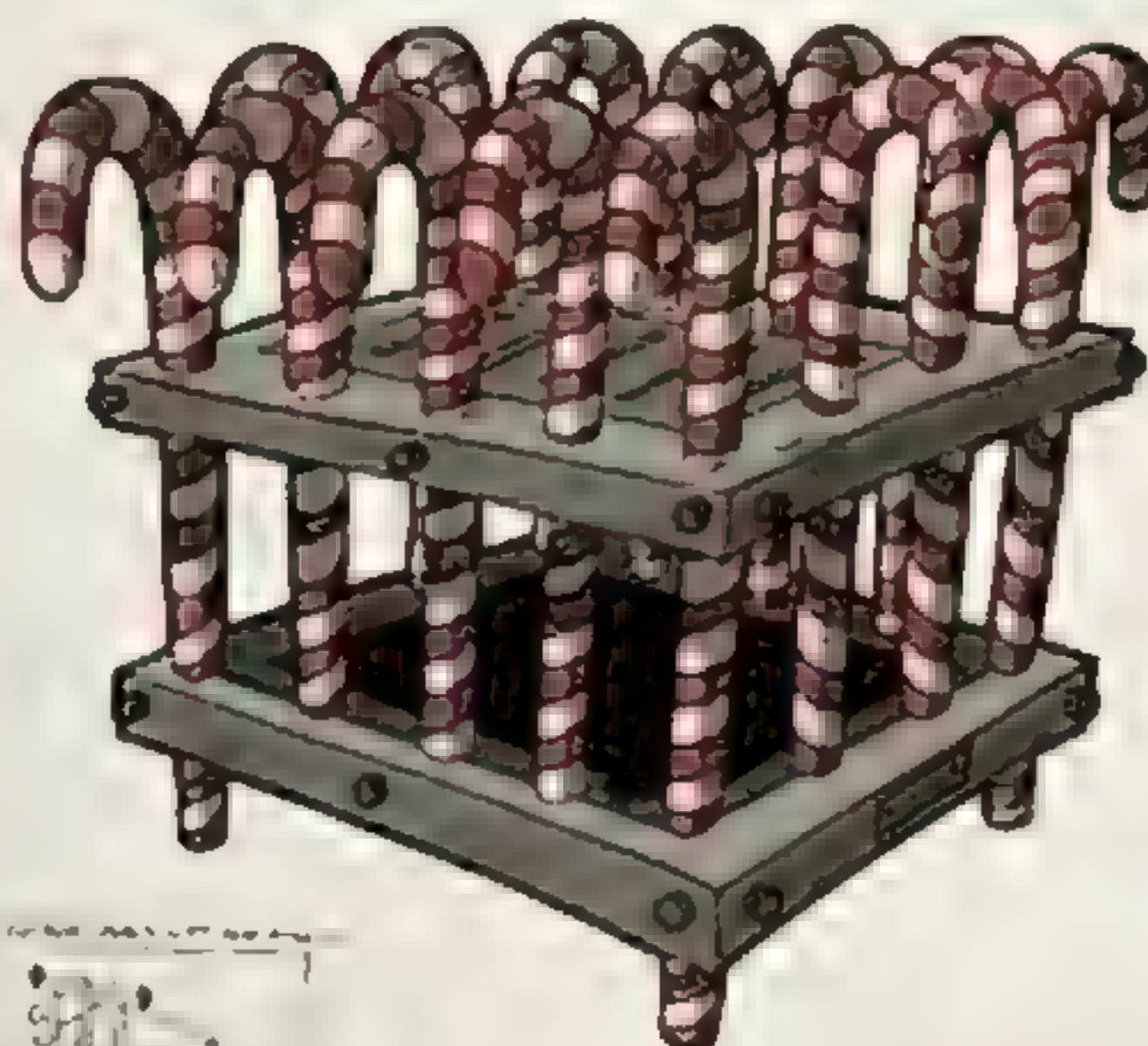
P0118 ICE CREAM TRUCK (BACK)



P0043 BUS (FRONT)



Hand-drawn floor plan of a room with a curved wall. The plan shows a 'PROP TEAM' area at the top, a 'PROP MOOD' area at the bottom right, and a central area labeled 'ENIGMA'.



**This spread:** Props are generally anything that a character picks up, moves, or interacts with, or are a moving part of the background artwork that must

be animated. Prop designs are sketched and painted to create color models like those above that are sent to the animation production studio for reference.





### EP1 (101) "The Nightmare Begins"

In which the Almighty Tallest enacts the great assigning of planets to the Operation Infiltrating Down 2 invaders, and Zim barges in uninvited. Assigned to Earth, Zim establishes himself among the Earthlings. His Skool classmate Dib comes to him, and vows to uncover his plan and secret identity.

**Almighty Tallest Red:** Zim, you're alive?

**Zim:** Yes! So very alive. And full of goo. Mission goo. Don't be surprised if I take care of the humans before the Armada even gets here.



### EP2A (102A) "Bestest Friend"

Zim realizes he needs a friend to fit in at Skool so as to deflect suspicion. Zim begins the selection process among the social misfits in the cafeteria.

**Zim:** We begin by testing your absorbency.

The third round test involves a bear and two rats, and is performed offscreen to the sounds of hellish screams, crutching, clomping, and buzzing. Keef, relatively unscathed, accepts Zim's friendship. Later, after no longer requiring his friendship services, but unable to shake his offers of waffles, parties, and other horrible, horrible things, Zim replaces Keef's eyeballs with cybernetic mind-controlling orbs to trick Keef into following a squirrel that he believes to be Zim. The episode ends starkly with Keef chasing the squirrel off of a three-story building, landing somewhere offscreen with a cinematic explosion and the plaintive question, "You don't like waffles?"



### EP2B (104B) "NanoZim"

When Gir leaves the door and windows open, Dib breaks into Zim's house dressed as a rat and escapes with photographic evidence of Zim without his anti-in disguise on.

**Dib:** Soon your Zim-guts will be strewn all over an autopsy table. Hahaha!

Later, Dib begins to lose control over his limbs and realizes that Zim is in a microscopic submersible inside of his body.

**Zim:** Now I'm in your trachea, Dib. Your brain is so close, I can smell it. Zim manages to force Dib's limbs to destroy the evidence. After an intense microbot battle inside Dib as waged among Zim, Dib, and Gaz, Zim's craft is disabled.

**Dib:** Now, for my finishing move! Stomach rumbling, Dib enters the bathroom. With a single flush, Zim swirls away screaming "The End."



### EP3A (103A) "Parent-Teacher Night"

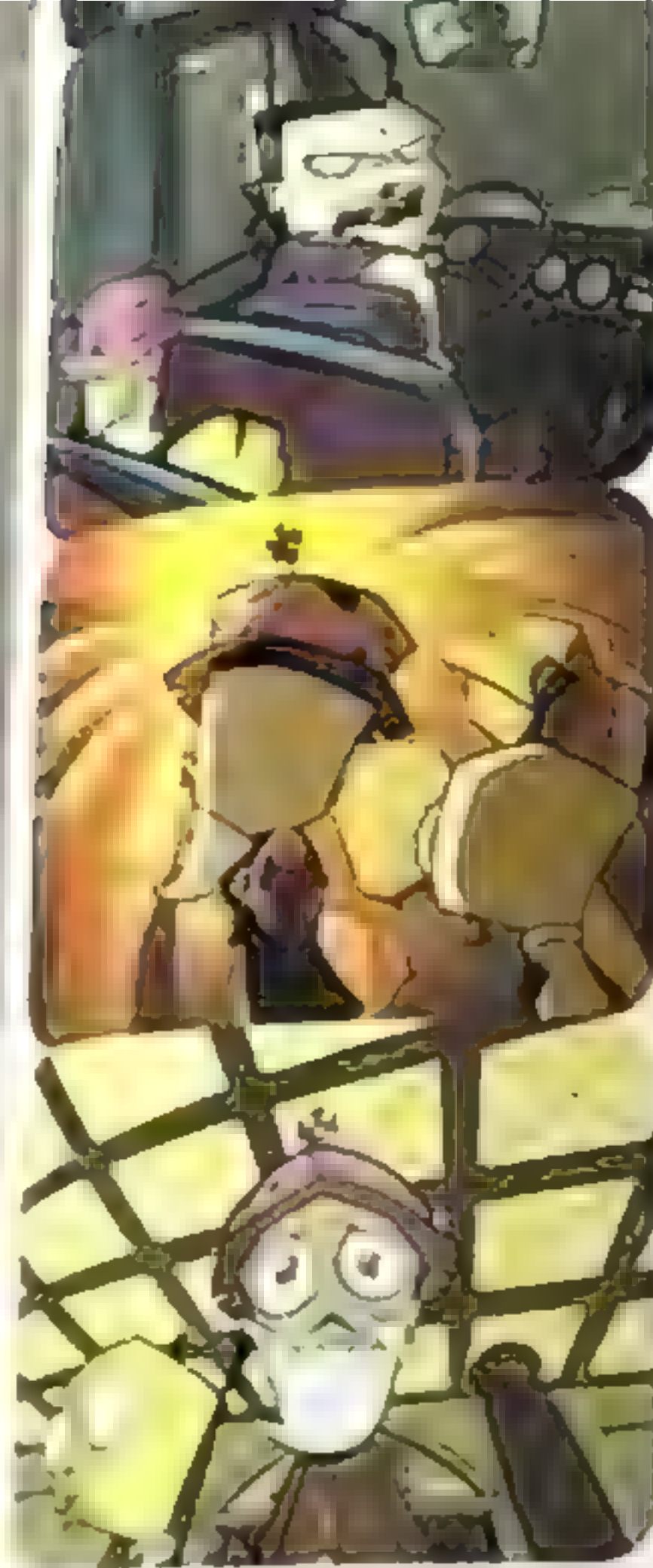
Dib taunts Zim about his predicament of having to come to parent-teacher night with no parents.

**Zim:** Yes, oh, I will bring my parents. And they shall be the greatest, most parental parents ever. Zim tries to make the the Robopop decoys learn human social behavior as a Clockwork Orange-style reprogramming session using a wall of monitors. After Zim leaves, Gir gets bored and changes the television channels, which lures the decoys with commercials and beautiful films. Chaos ensues but Zim gets through parent-teacher night without revealing his true identity.



# INVADER ZIM EPISODES





### EP3B (103B) "The End of Doom"

After watching a movie in which the Earth-conquering alien race is felled by human germs, Zim laughs indignantly, then has multiple panic attacks as the micro-goggles that he orders from Planet Callnowia reveal germs covering every surface. Zim disinfects everything in a frenzy. Gir comes home with his filthy pig friend and rolls all over everything. While out on a trip to buy more disinfectant, Gir sees MacMeaties restaurant and Zim chases him inside. Everything is as germ-encrusted inside as elsewhere except for the burgers, which are germ-free.

2. Gir: On this planet, I'm not worried by danger... I'm worried by germs.

After finding the location of the restaurant and most of the city's germs, Zim returns with pina-fish and a can of disinfectant. Zim returns home.



### EP4A (104A) "Germs"

After watching a movie in which the Earth-conquering alien race is felled by human germs, Zim laughs indignantly, then has multiple panic attacks as the micro-goggles that he orders from Planet Callnowia reveal germs covering every surface. Zim disinfects everything in a frenzy. Gir comes home with his filthy pig friend and rolls all over everything. While out on a trip to buy more disinfectant, Gir sees MacMeaties restaurant and Zim chases him inside. Everything is as germ-encrusted inside as elsewhere except for the burgers, which are germ-free.

**Zim:** You! Burgerlord. How is it that this meat is so pure? So perfect? It turns out that the restaurant's meat is Space Meat, made of napkins. The Space Meat inspires Zim's plan. Zim returns to school, making his grand entrance covered in space meat.



### EP4B (102B) "Dark Harvest"

In Skool, Zim contracts head-pigeons (a pigeon lands on his head) and is sent to the nurse by Ms. Bitters. Dib is delighted, confident that Zim will be exposed as an alien when the nurse discovers no human organs inside of him. Zim is also confident, however, and once in the hallways, he begins his dark harvest, using a device to steal human organs from the school populace by swapping them with other non-organ objects, such as a cat, a remote control, or a can of poop. Even Gaz is not spared, though she continues



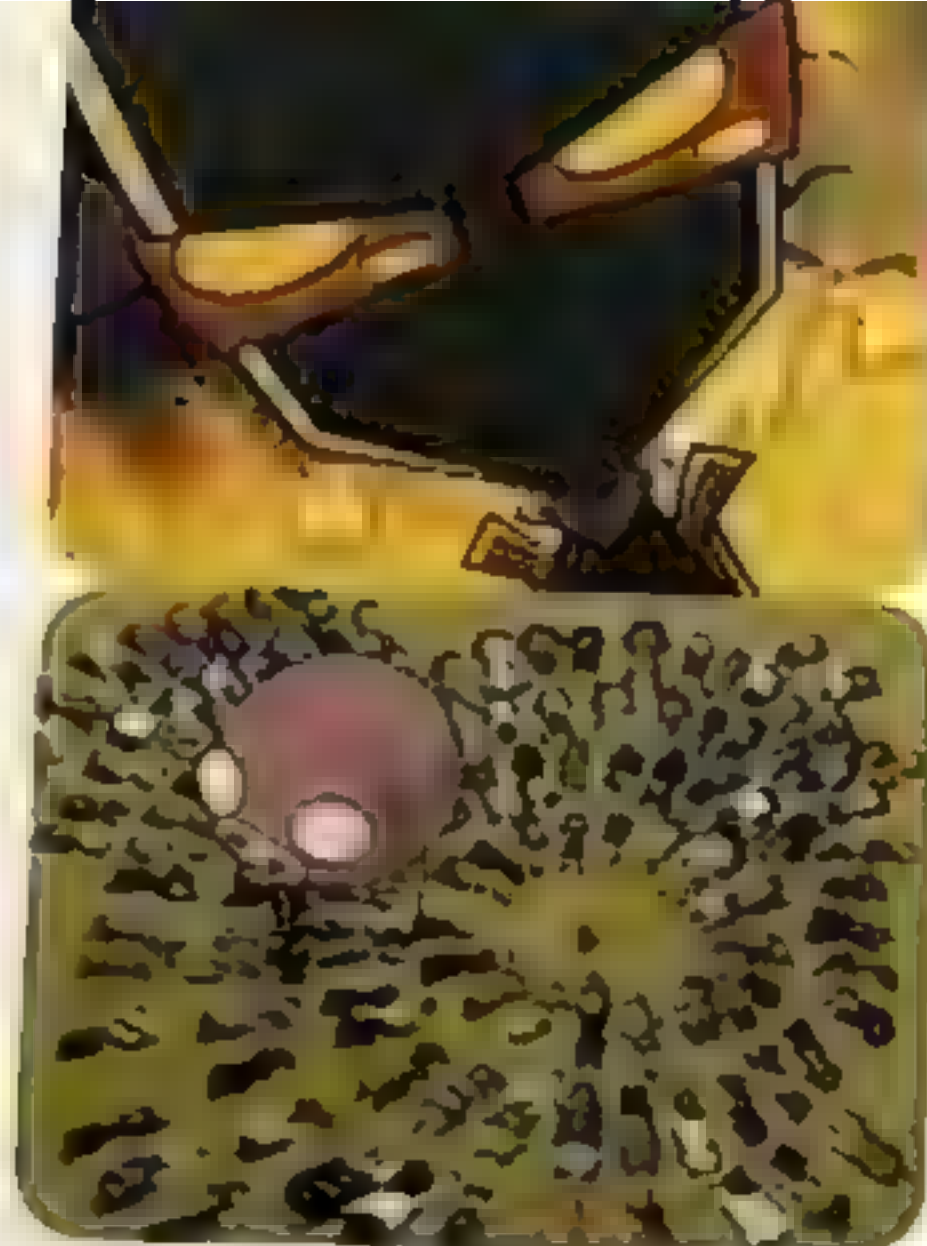
to play her Game Slave while it is buried somewhere inside her. Dib confronts a now engorged with human organs Zim.

**Dib:** You're a hideous blob of stolen organs!

**Zim:** I've been working out. GACK! [He vomits a spool of large intestine and slurps it up again like a lollipop.]

After an epic horror sequence of unrelenting drama and suspense, the episode ends in the nurse's office, with Zim all cleared as healthy and human, and Dib singled out as a hideous mooing cyborg boy (Zim having replaced one of his organs with a moo-making toy).





### EP5A (105A) "Attack of the Saucer Morons"

Testing the detective capabilities of human law enforcement, Zim causes a police car to crash off the highway overpass into a giant water restaurant, and then his own car to crash into a park because of a chase with a single bee. Zim requests towing help from Grr, but can't get there, because Grr is driving at an all night rave. After returning the following day to retrieve the ship himself, Zim discovers to his horror that attendees at an alien convention have found it first. When they discover Zim is at hand after his disguise falls off, Zim knows he will be detected.

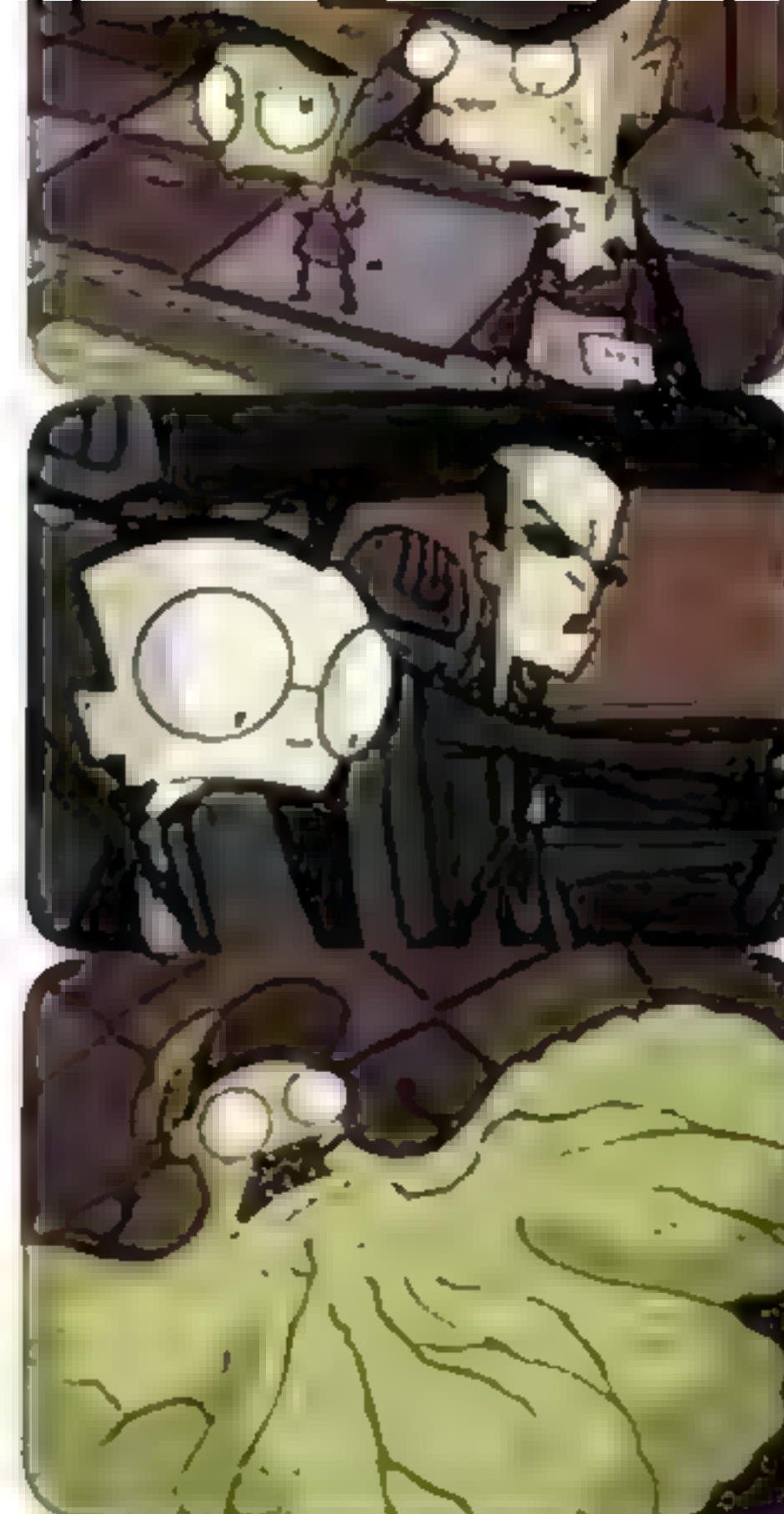
**Zim:** Don't come any closer! Don't try anything on me or I'll... I'll... I'll lay eggs in your stomach! I mean it! The alien convention attendees instead work to pin and lize him, and request... falling the crates on their toes. Finally escaping, Zim and Grr crash into another bee, and then land on another alien convention.



### EP5B (105B) "The Wettening"

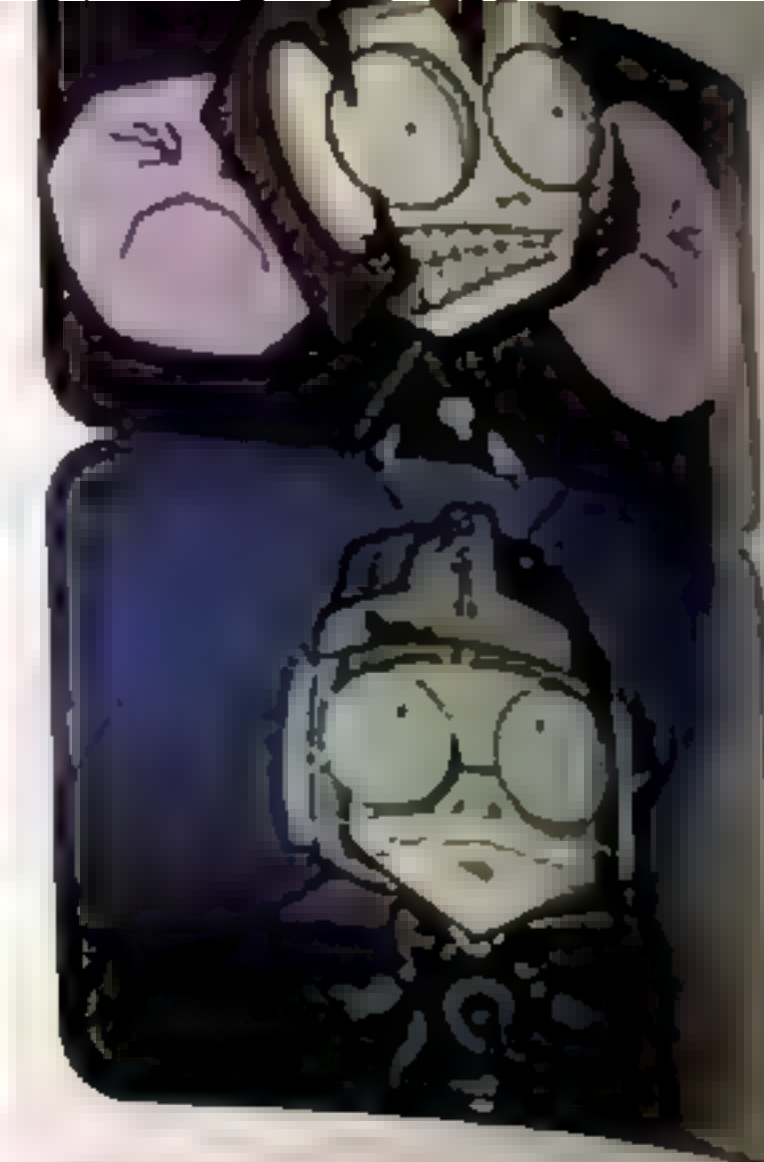
Dib notices that water causes Zim incredible discomfort when it is raining and vows to torment and harass him on Monday. Zim, noticing that the paste on his hand creates a water barrier, counter vows to thwart Dib and seek revenge. Dib arrives at school with a water balloon launching weapon, ready to attack Zim. But Zim is in space, having created a giant space water balloon filled with most of the water on Earth. Zim drops the balloon and destroys Skool, the entire city, and probably everything.

**Zim:** Grr, I'll be in my lab, bathing in paste. Don't disturb me.



### EP6A (106A) "Career Day"

At Skool's career day, the children take a test to determine their future occupations. A machine, the POS 2000, drops from the ceiling and analyzes the results. The children are assigned to spend the day with an adult mentor in their field. Zim is assigned to work in fast food preparation at Mc-Meaties (not Mac Meaties this time), and Dib is paired with a paranormal investigator, Bill, who is obsessed with subjects that Dib knows to be hoaxes, or just silly. Dib learns that Zim is about to undergo a hideous molting while on the job, but is unable to get the paranormal investigator to witness it in time. Zim gets fired.



### EP6B (106B) "Battle-Dib"

In one of the Zim's escape plans, preparing to present new evidence to the Swollen Earl, Zim uses a paranormal investigator to help him get a permission slip to enter the school. Attempting to get access to Professor Membrane at his studio, Dib is rejected by security. Dib's only option is to become an audience member at his father's show by passing a written test and a series of battle-dome tests. After losing and being escorted out, Dib uses a diversion and escapes into his father's dressing room where he begs for Professor Membrane's signature on his permission slip for the sake of all mankind.

**Professor Membrane:** Now now! I don't sign autographs on stage, little boy.

Kicked into the alley, Dib is detained. However, security tosses out the age-old permission slip after all, and Dib is jubilant. At his presentation, however, he realizes that he has forgotten his test with evidence in the alley.



# INVADER ZIM EPISODES





### EP7A (107A) "Planet Jackers"

Jackers from another alien planet invade the Earth in a giant ship with inward-facing windows in the sky. The Jackers invade the Earth and its moon, and their dying home planet is covered in firewood. Zim has a secret plan, but in the end, he breaks out of its own shell and is crushed into the ground. It is the Earth's darkest hour, a deep black space of a void.

Earth is safe! I did it, Girl! Go destroy it!

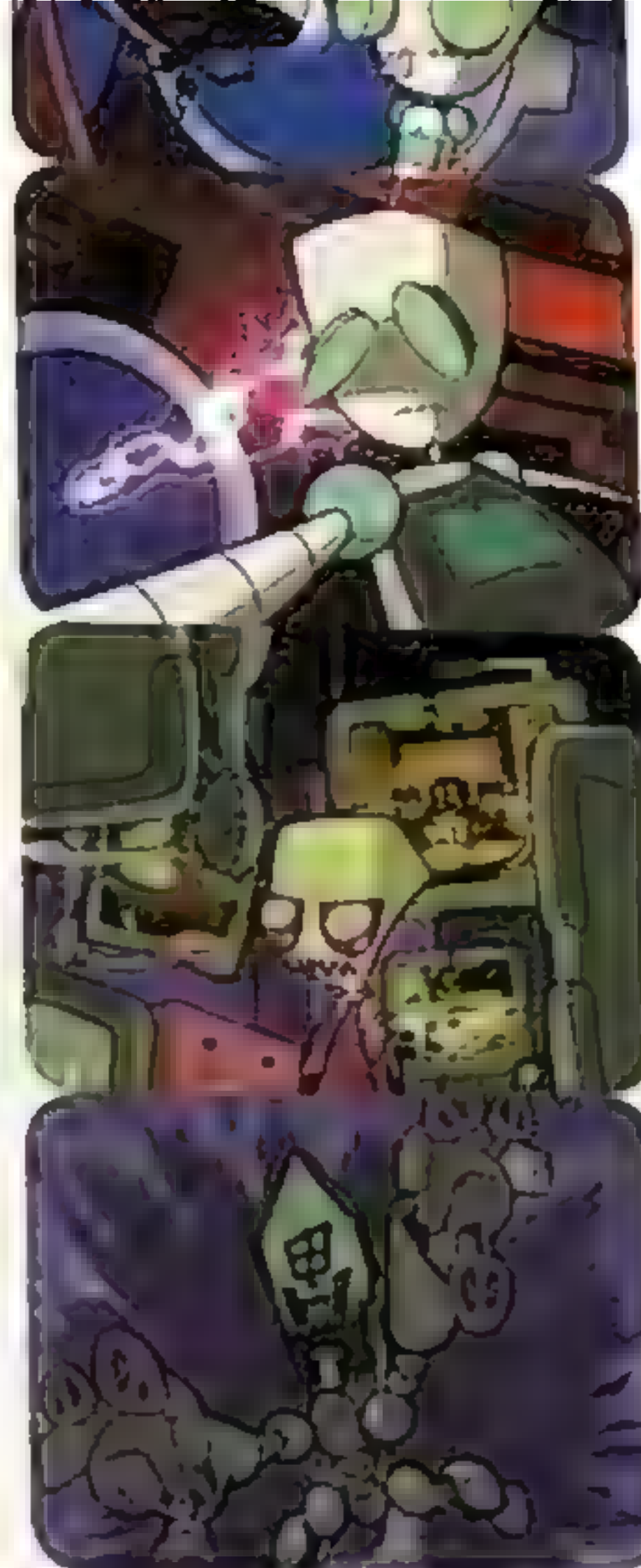


### EP7B (108A) "Rise of the Zitboy"

Dib is aware of a weakness in Zim's secret base but won't tell him what it is. Gir has pizza delivered, and then rubs pizza grease all over Zim's face, which develops a zit. It grows to an outrageous size, with a semi-transparent skin and sloshing liquid visible inside. Zim is stricken.

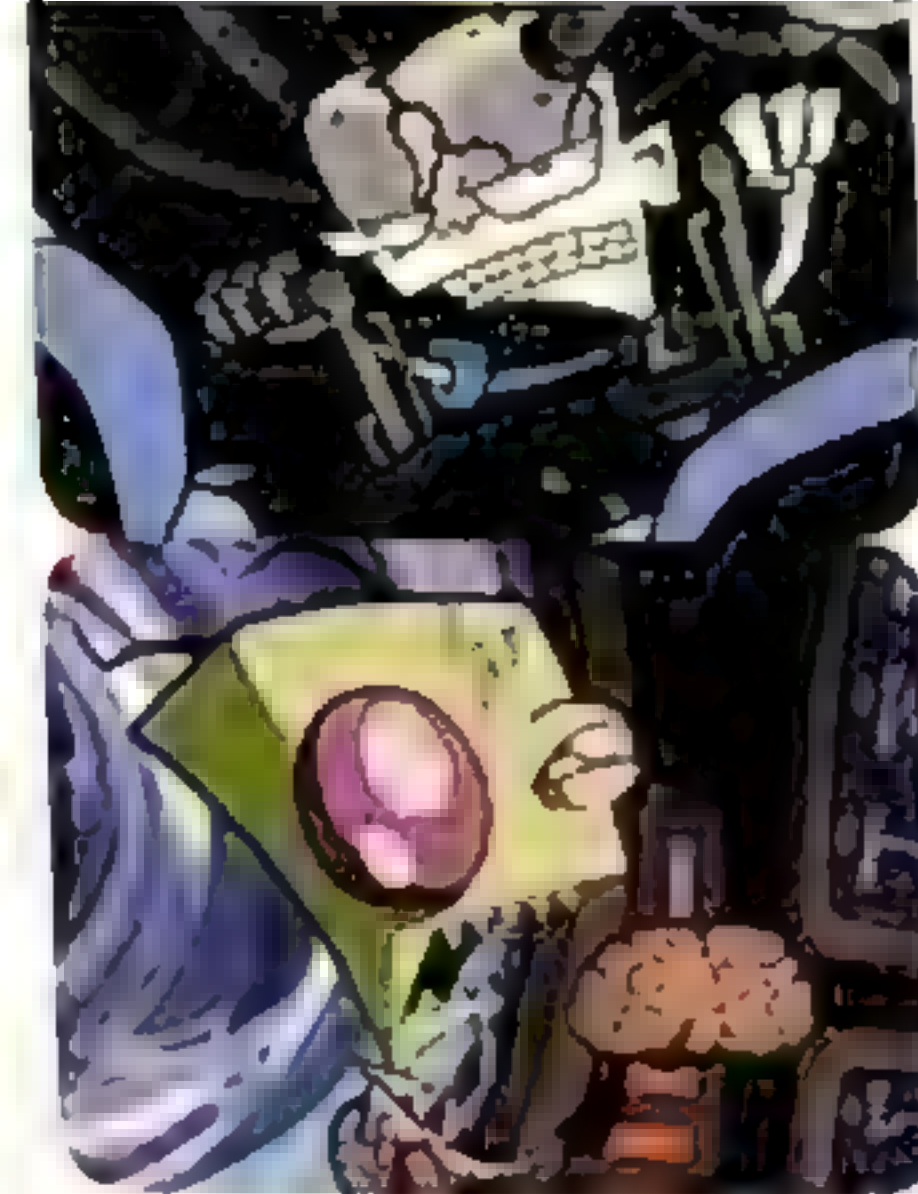
**Zim:** How can I study this planet if the entire population is staring at my freakishly deformed head?!

Gir draws a face on the zit, and suddenly hypnotized by the sloshing zit's visage, goes into a subservient trance. Zim quickly realizes that his zit has mind-controlling powers, dresses the zit up with a doll body, and names it Pustulio. At Skool, Zim hypnotizes the children, then forces Dib to reveal the secret weakness that he has found. Zim's zit pops, gushing pus like a firehose. Dib has to clean up the mess.



### EP8A (108B) "Invasion of the Idiot Dog Brain"

Zim has to replace the artificial intelligence brain that controls the entire secret base in order to fix the security system. Gir's head encroaches on the energy beam as the brain transference is engaged and becomes the sentient mind of the entire house's computer. Deciding to get tired, the Gir-house grows legs and rampages through the city to a restaurant, only to realize it doesn't have a mouth.



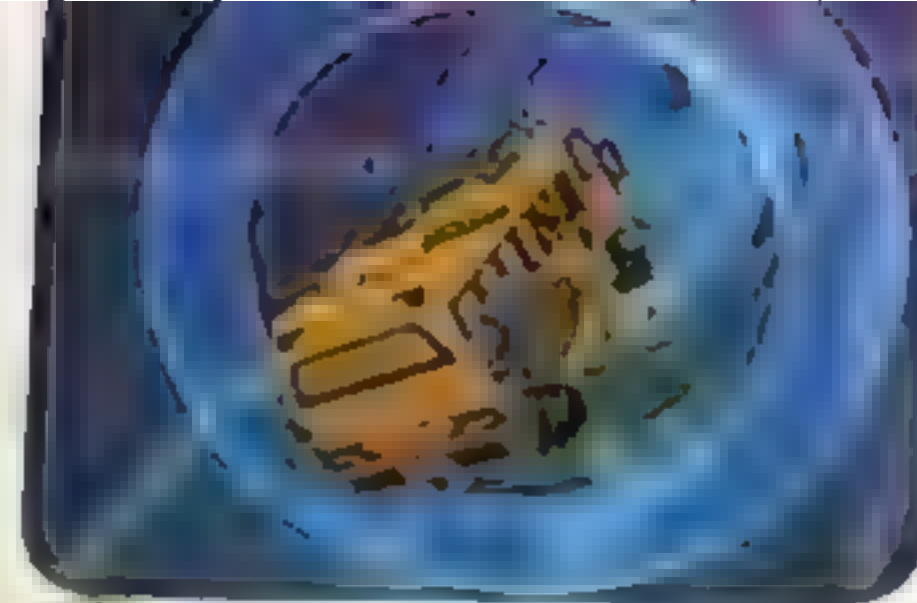
### EP8B (107B) "Bad, Bad Rubber Piggy"

Professor Membrane, demonstrating the evils of space-time displacement on *Probing the Membrane of Science*: So, despite the temptation, a teeing the timeline is more foolish than productive. Anybody who would build a space-time object replacement device is a complete MORON!

**Zim:** Gir! The space-time object replacement device is ready!

Zim replaces objects from Dib's past with rubber piggies at inopportune moments, causing lasting bodily harm to Dib until he dies. An unforeseen result is that Professor Membrane creates the fusion-powered titanium exoskeleton Mega Boy 3000, which revives Dib with the strength of ten thousand little boys. Dib seeks revenge by attacking Zim's house. Zim sends one more piggy back in time with a note for himself to not mess with time after all, but it replaces his brain in the present, rendering him a drooling idiot.





### EP9A (109A) "A Room with a Moose"

In School Dib complains to Ms. Bitters that Zim has taken more than three times in the bathroom. Zim repairs himself triumphantly declaring that his business is done and he has a lot of it to do. A mysterious new school instructor, Gaz, uses over the PA system to tell everyone in the class except for Zim to meet for a mandatory school trip. Zim and Gaz teleport home to continue phase two of the plan. "Leave no evidence!" Zim yells as the toilet stall explodes. Zim launches Dib and the rest of the class into space on a fake school bus with out-of-control, into a wormhole. This wormhole was specially researched and selected by Zim after passing on a billion miles of purple planets and another of pure darkness, to land in a room with a moose. Zim uses his socially radioactive status to move the entire school bus full of children to the opposite side, tilting their bus safely back to Earth.

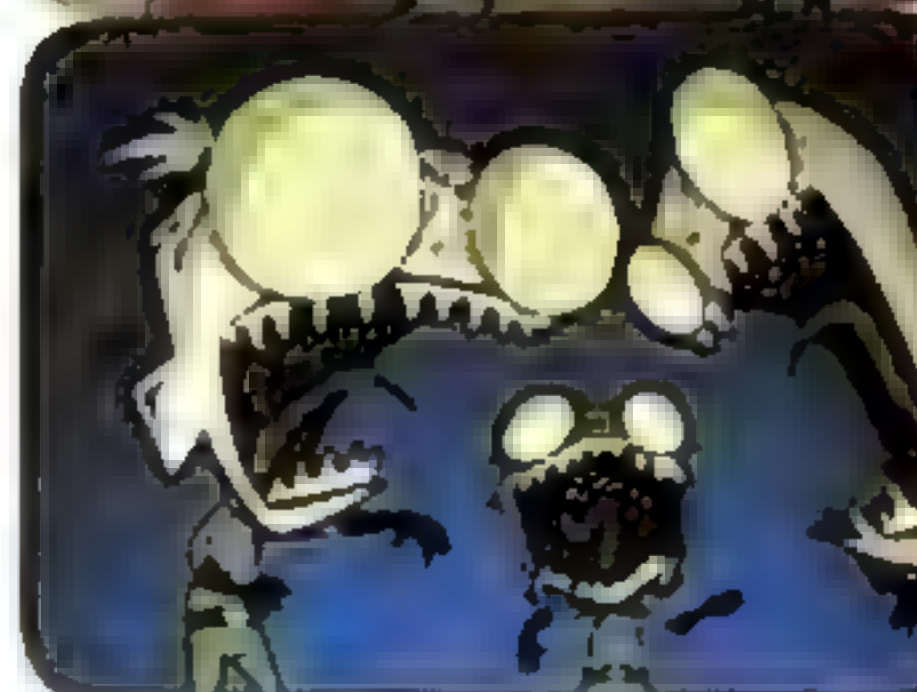


### EP9B (109B) "Hamstergeddon"

Ms. Bitters's class is issued a classroom pet, Peepi the hamster. Zim witnesses how humans think it is cute, and reasons that that makes them weak. He plans to grow the hamster to an enormous size and use it to conquer the humans.

**Dib:** Ms. Bitters, have you noticed anything strange about the hamster? He's three times the size and he has that hideous throbbing alien device on his back.

Inevitably the hamster grows into Ultra Peepi and begins to destroy the city. Zim and Dib are forced to fight together, against the giant hamster.



### EP10A (110A) "Plague of Babies"

While landing the Voot Cruiser on the roof, Zim and Gir are seen out of their disguises by a person in the window next door, which turns out to be a baby. Zim goes next door as "the neighborhood baby inspector" to interrogate the baby, but is repelled by the smell. Later, when confronted by a gang of babies in his own house, Zim learns that the babies are aliens who have come to steal Zim's ship. In battle, the babies form a mega-baby, but Zim defeats them with an amplifier that makes them all stupid, like real babies.



### EP10B (110B) "Bloaty's Pizza Hog"

It's the Membrane family's annual night out and Gaz's turn to close the restaurant. She chooses Bloaty's Pizza Hog, but Dib gets captured by / breaking into his secret lair, and Professor Membrane doesn't have a "last night" opening for another year. Gaz, trying to locate Dib so that they can find him with Gir's help by teleports to the spaceship orbiting Earth, where Zim is about to experiment on Dib. Considering whether or not the Membranes could still go out to eat at Dib's, organs were on the table, that Gaz realizes that she needs to save him before that happens. Creating an escape ship directly into Bloaty's in time for dinner, the family's meal, and Zim, coming in to make scared away by the horrible animated creatures of Bloaty's.



# INVADER ZIM EPISODES





### EP11A (111A) "Door to Door"

Zim shows the children of the neighborhood how to use the Pop Cola Dawg machine, a drawing scheme for a new day's sales, with prizes for the best students. The prizes are so magnificent, that they drive Zim into a rage of greed. Dib notes Zim's interest in him, just to watch him fail. The children descend on a machine drawing zombies. After setbacks, Zim tries the ineffective human approach. Zim invades the couch-bound couple's apartment, claiming that they are infected. He forces them to experience horrific torture.

Zim sees a world in which he can buy my delicious treats! But the lies in ruins. Zim gets the top prize, Zim's favorite one, and instead of a can of tuna.



### EP11B (111B) "FBI Warning of Doom"

Gir is watching a DVD for the hundredth plus time, and Zim happens to see the FBI WARNING screen. Zim asks his computer what the FBI is and it gives an educated guess. "Founded in 1492, by, uh, demons, the FBI is a crack law enforcement agency with a mission to, I don't know, uh, fight aliens?" Zim, terrified of the government spy device, vows to return it immediately and breaks into the mall where the Video Outhouse is. Late-night security guard Sergeant Slab awaits. Zim barrels toward the video deposit slot avoiding laser cannon blasts and sensor arrays, but is captured. Escaping Slab's prisoner pit, Zim retrieves the disc from under the sergeant's nose and disables the laser guard system. Left with no choice, Slab releases his mall-zombie army, recalling scenes from George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), but the zombies are very dumb and easy to avoid.



### EP12A (112A) "Bolognius Maximus"

Dib taunts Zim in the Skool cafeteria, then throws a slab of baloney on his head which burns Zim's skin. In revenge, Zim places a rack on Dib's chair, which injects baloney DNA into his body, fusing with his own. By the time Dib arrives at Skool the next day he's torn to shreds from dogs licking and attacking him, they gather on him, and he gives off a strong aroma of baloney. The class protests.

**Ms. Bitters:** Silence! If I have to put up with the awesome force of your collective child-stench every day, then so shall you all!

Later, realizing what has happened, Dib tricks Zim into also being injected with baloney DNA to force Zim to develop an antidote. Back at his base, Zim's security system no longer recognizes his altered DNA and ejects him as an intruder. Attempting to work together, Zim and Dib fail to formulate an antidote in Dib's lab. After a fight, they find themselves outdoors again surrounded by dogs, and run to the safety of an abandoned house, where the episode ends with both fully transformed into sausages.



### EP12B (112B) "Game Slave 2"

In the second Zim-less episode, Gaz sees a commercial for the Game Slave 2, the latest version of her handheld system. She goes to the mall to buy one, but only after being delayed because Dib wanted to watch *Mysteries, Mysteries* first. The line to purchase one is huge, and when Gaz is about to get the last unit, Iggy, behind her, tricks the clerk into selling it to him instead. Gaz demands justice and then haunts Iggy until scaring him into selling it to her in a skyscraper-elevator freefall. After Gaz exits, the elevator breaks, plummeting fifty flights into the ground with Iggy inside.



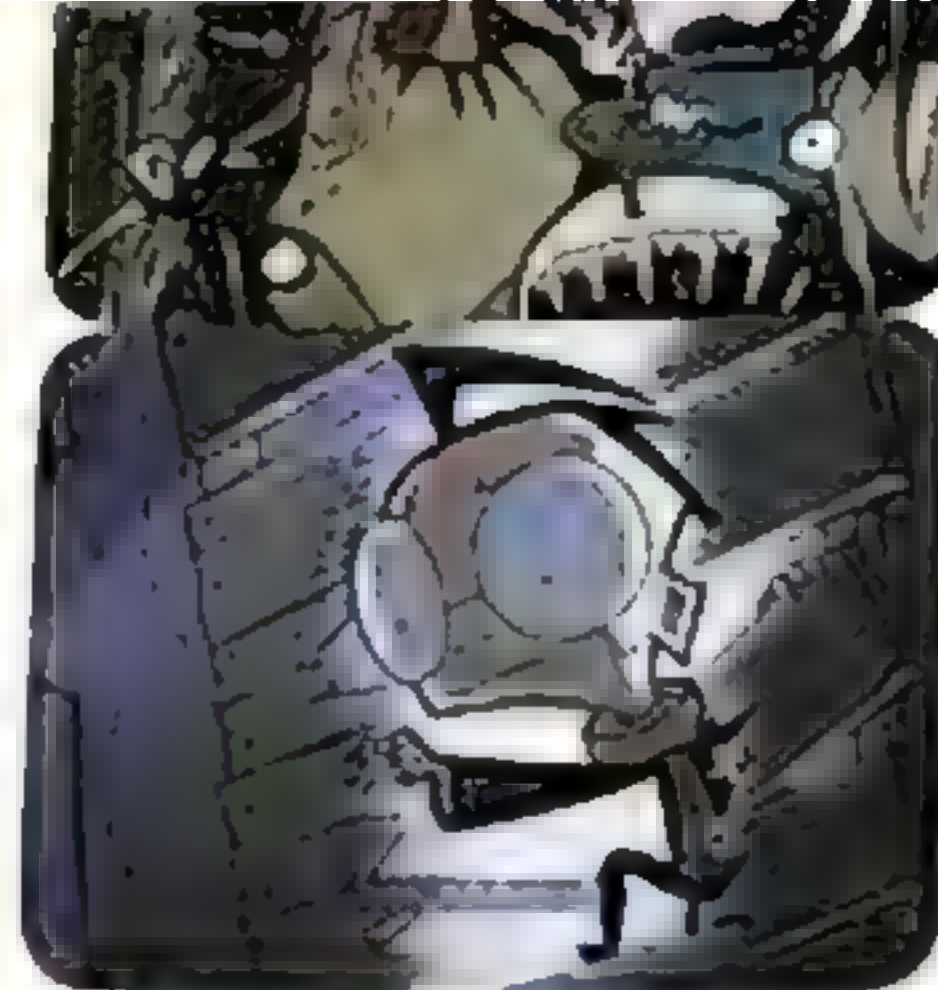


### EP13 (113A & B) "Battle of the Planets"

On Mars, Zim discovers that another alien race had converted the planet and another nearby into giant slaps before going extinct. Meanwhile, the Takeri Armada is preparing to destroy all organic life on a planet in their first successful invader mission of Operation Imposing Doom 2. In a speech preceded by the organic sweep, the Talles give credit to Zim (without him knowing) for not being there to mess everything up.

**Almighty Talles Red:** So let's give a big cheer for invader Zim, for being so far away.

Dib, who has monitored Mars since he was a baby, sees Zim and Gaz, and realizes that Earth is in grave danger. Zim, after all, has decided to orbit the surface of his Mars ship around Earth, destroying all life. Dib begs for help at NASAPlace, but is ignored, then finds a fellow Swollen Eyeball member, the creator, who lets him fly a rocket capsule to Mercury, which is the other planet ship. Dib battles Zim and Gaz. After Zim's plan is thwarted, the Almighty Talles laugh at him, not realizing that the runaway Mars ship has not crashed through their armada in the background.



### EP14 (116A & B) "Halloween Spectacular of Spooky Doom"

At Skool, Dib keeps phasing in and out of an alternate nightmare zone that only he can see. Zim is terrified at the prospect of the other children turning into "candy-starved zombies," as Ms. Bitters describes them. Dib is sent to the Crazy House for Boys by the white coats for acting crazier than usual.

**Professor Membrane:** So I find you here, son. Oh, I suppose it was only a matter of time.

In the alternate dimension, all the monsters want to fulfill the prophecy by escaping through Dib's giant head back to the real world. Briefly phased back to reality, Dib runs to Zim for help, asking to use his lab, but accidentally transports both Zim and himself back to the nightmare zone. After battling monster versions of Ms. Bitters, Professor Membrane, and Gaz, Zim and Dib escape through a portal in Dib's head. The Ms. Bitters monster begins to follow through, but is horrified at the sight of a bloated Gaz and comatose children full of candy, and she retreats.



### EP15A (114A) "Mysterious Mysteries"

Facing pressure to create a more exciting *Mysterious Mysteries* show, and with no other good prospects for stories, the TV host decides to dip into the Dib Archive of material that Dib has been sending in for years.

**TV Host:** Thanks to a horribly large-headed boy named Dib, we have a new piece in the puzzle that is the search for alien life.

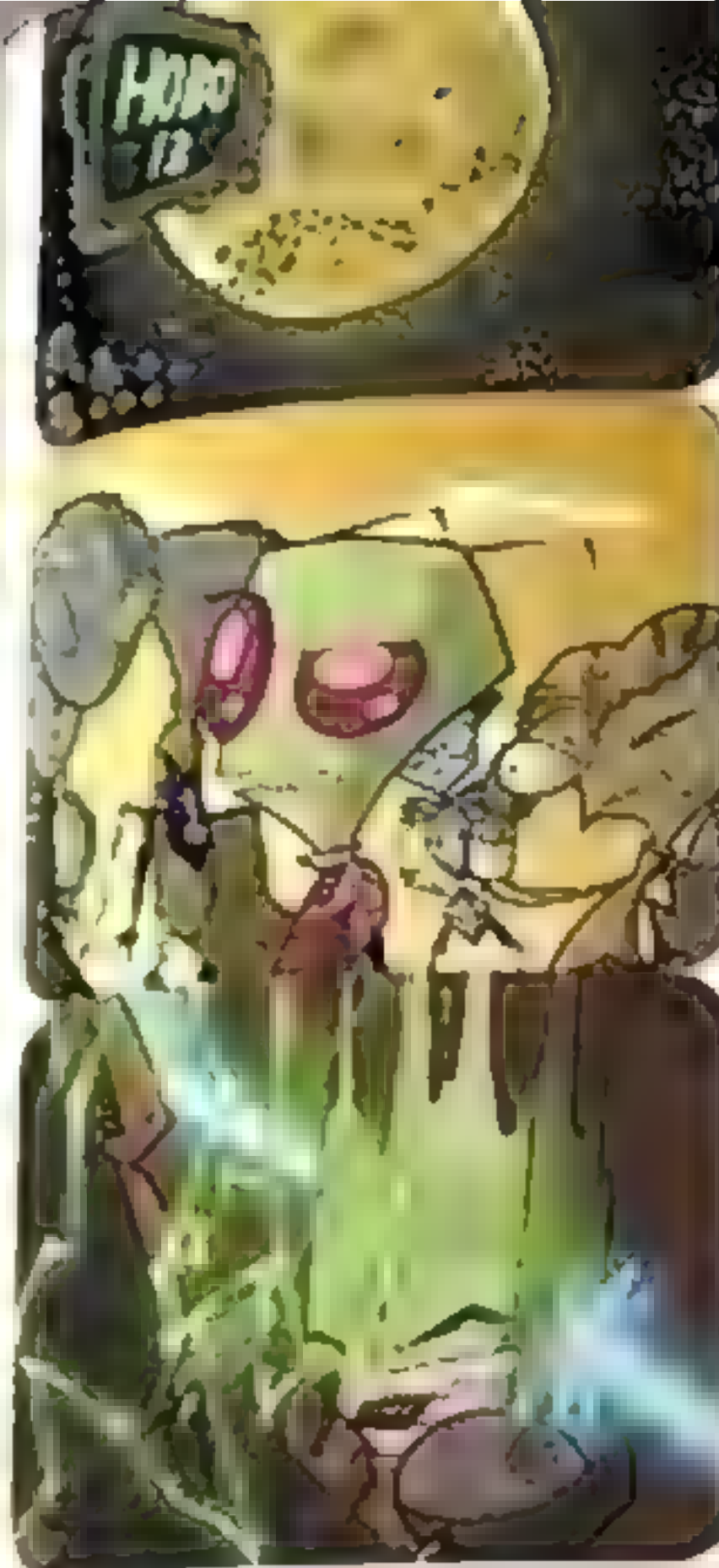
Dib, Zim, Gaz, and Gir retell their versions of the scene caught on video, which is reenacted terribly for the show. Zim is not outed as an alien.



### EP15B (115B) "Future Dib"

Professor Membrane requires to make his greatest announcement that he's ever made since last week. He has created the Perpetual Energy Generator, or PEG, which is about to activate. Either it will succeed or it will send out a "wave of DOOM" that will destroy all life on Earth. Zim sees this as his opportunity to destroy all life on Earth and plants a robot. Dib infiltrates the bedroom to trick Dib into revealing instructions and watching a video of a cage with a monkey in it. When captured, Zim controls the monkey and his ship in orbit, planning to use access to the PEG, and setting off destruction. From the cage, Dib is able to partially hack into the robot and manages to annoy Gaz enough that she breaks up until its eye pops out. Meanwhile, the crowd has been mean to Professor Membrane while waiting, and so he shuts down the PEG himself. Life returns to normal at home as Gaz now has repurposed the broken Dib robot as her personal alarm and Professor Membrane can't tell the difference. Meanwhile, Zim and Gaz are watching their favorite live TV show a feed of Dib (now with a gray beard) trapped in the cage with a monkey.

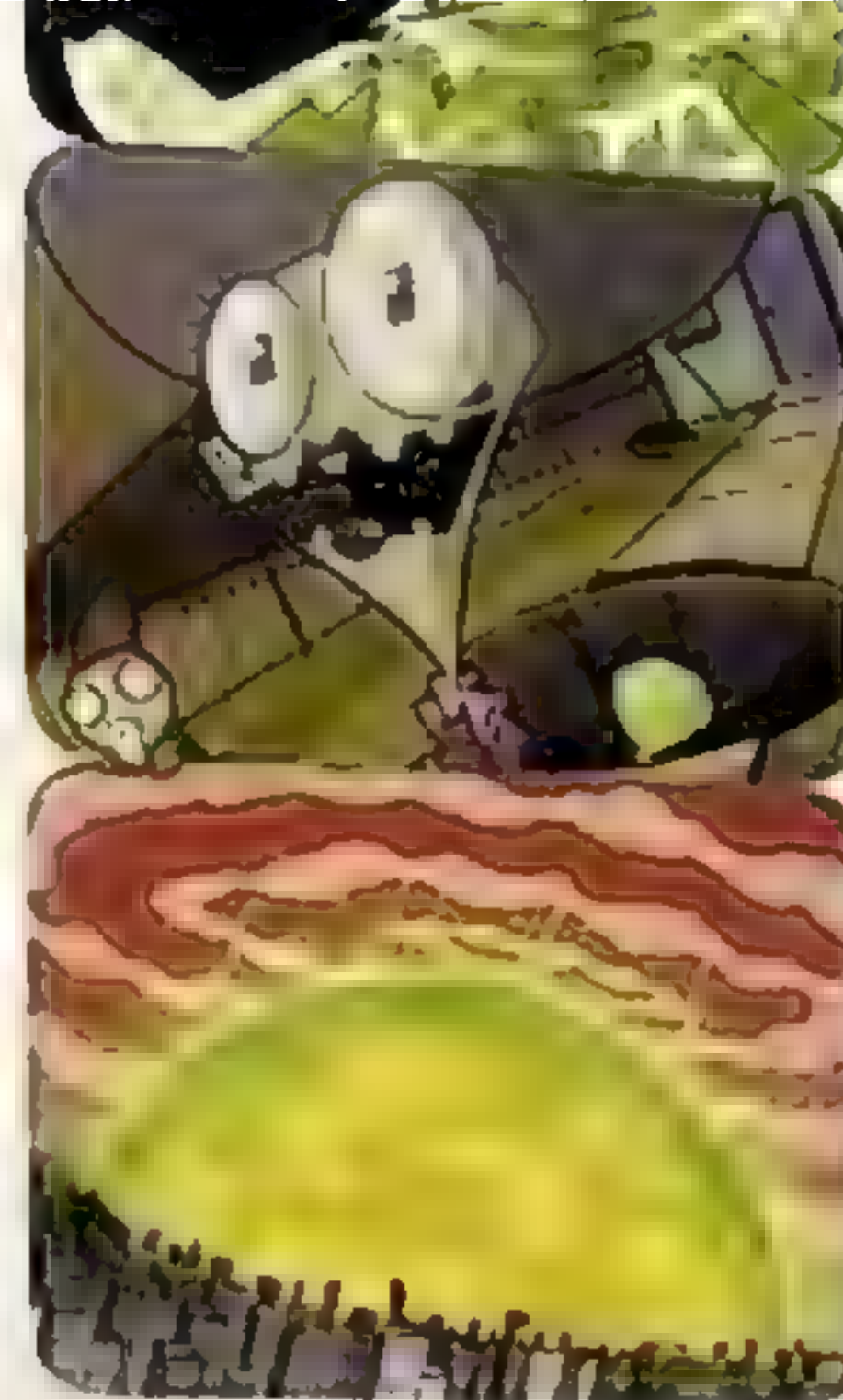




### EP16A (115A) "Hobo 13"

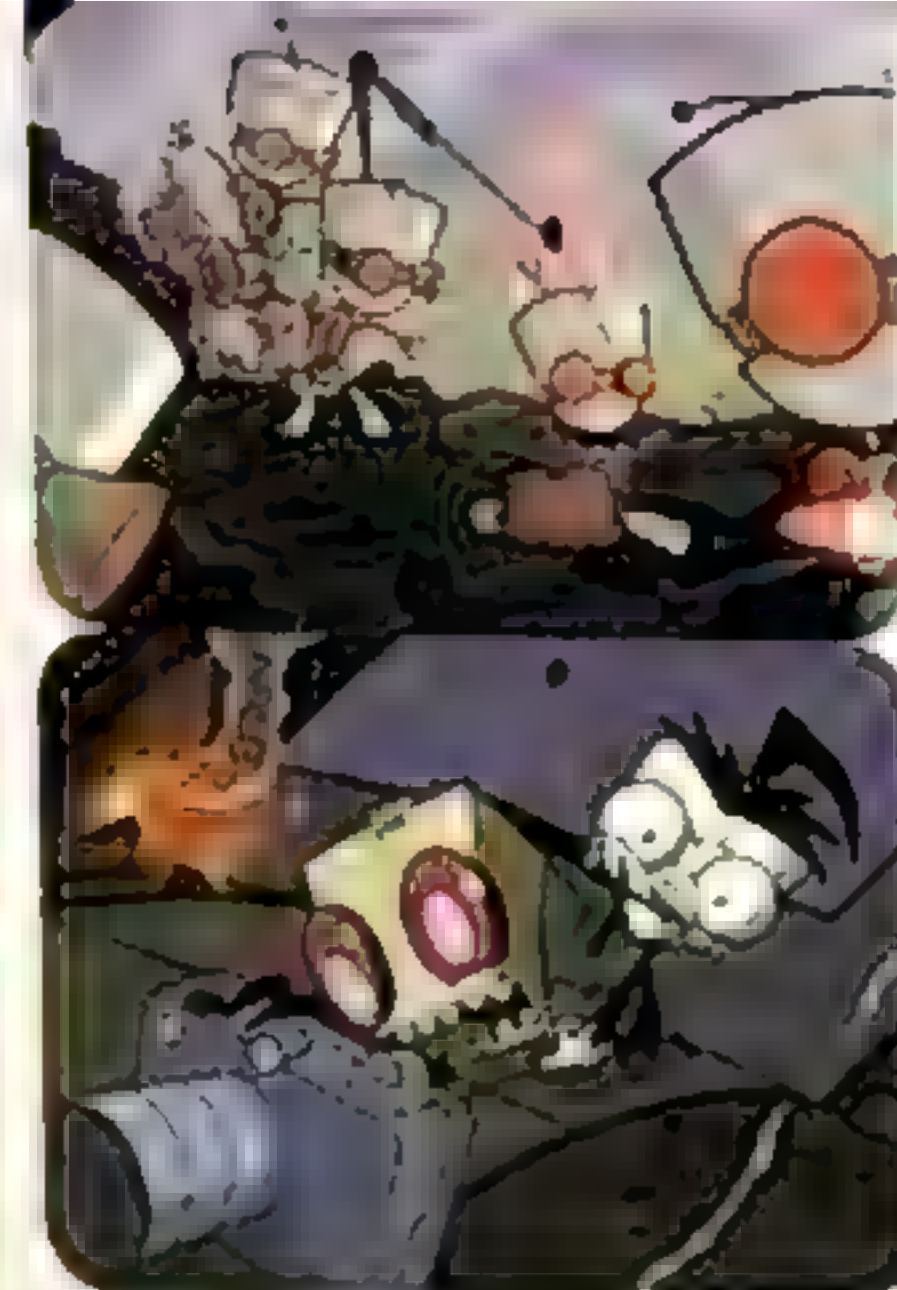
Zim's powerful weapons  
Zim's Tallst in order to  
Zim's Tallst.

**Almighty Tallst Red: Your**  
Zim's mission is to observe the  
Zim's Tallst and hate it.  
Zim's Tallst send Zim to Hobo  
Zim's Tallst from  
Zim's Tallst as a soldier? Zim is  
Zim's Tallst of soldiers hon-  
Zim's Tallst of trials, but he  
Zim's Tallst each of them one  
Zim's Tallst by the Tallst.  
Zim's Tallst that the con-  
Zim's Tallst him straight into  
Zim's Tallst of the nearest star.



### EP16B (118A) "Walk for Your Lives"

Zim has suspended Dib in a variable  
time stasis field to present to the Tallst  
on Probing Day, and he tries to show  
them during a video call. The experiment  
melts down, and creates a slow-motion  
explosion in Zim's lab. Zim tries to move  
the explosion to the city cesspit but  
fails, and it continues to explode in the  
middle of the city, growing slowly. Dib  
is also in slow motion. Zim decides to  
make the explosion happen at normal  
speed so that he can get it over with,  
because he expects the Almighty Tallst  
would be calling back in one hour. To  
do so, against the computer and Gir's  
urging, Zim launches slow-Dib into  
the explosion, and it explodes. The city  
is destroyed, including Zim's base. Dib  
stumbles into frame only to collapse on  
his face, where he remains, motionless.



### EP17A (119B) "Megadoomer"

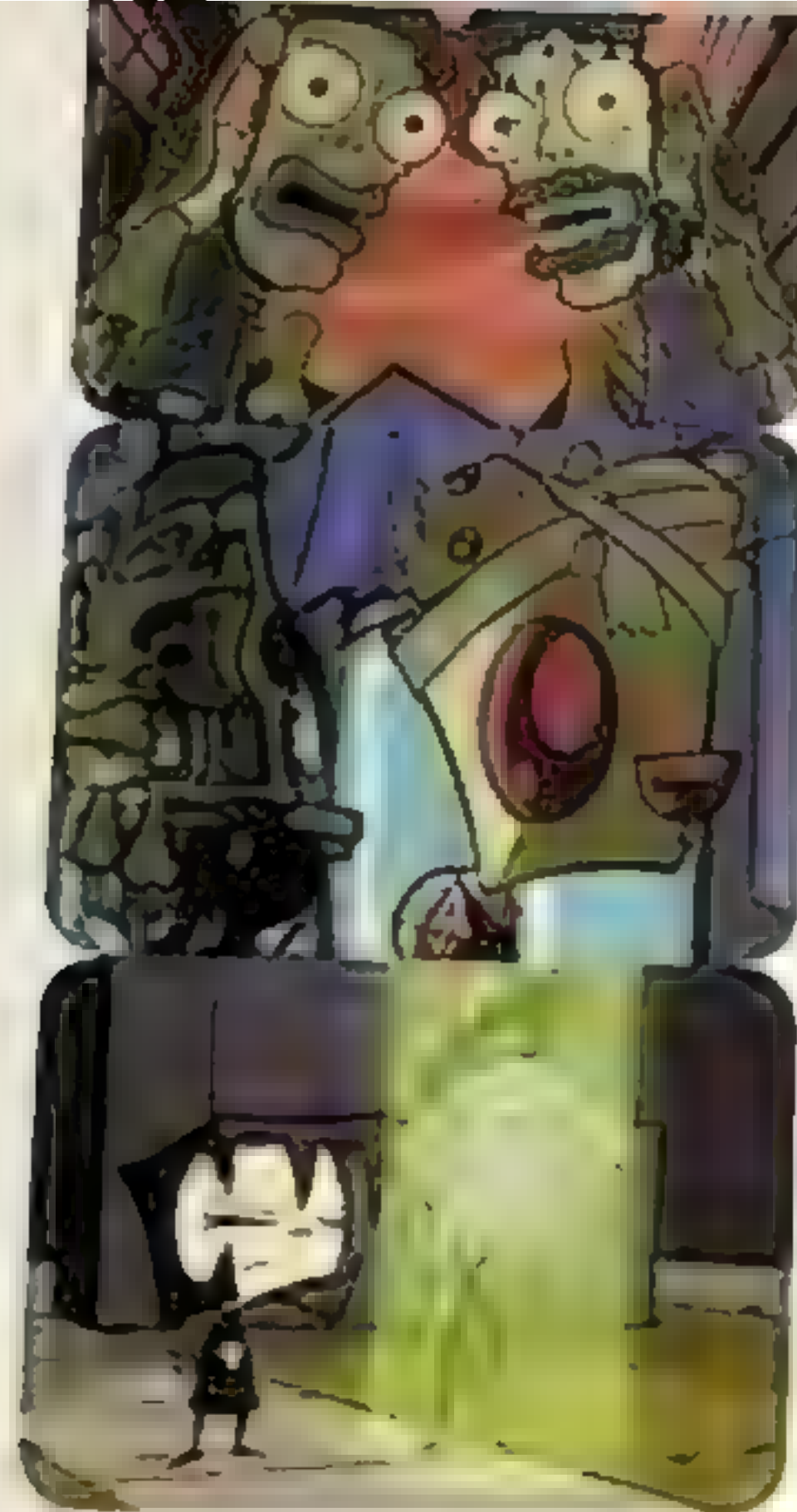
The Almighty Tallst take inventory of  
technology in a shipping center and see  
a holding chamber of malfunctioning  
SIR units attacking each other. They  
decide to send them to Zim, but a  
worker slave on the computered shipping  
planet decides to rebel by switching the  
address labels on two boxes, resulting  
in Zim receiving the Megadoomer  
X-3 Combat Stealth Mech, the most  
powerful stealth robot in the Iken  
military. Zim receives the robot and  
immediately sets out to destroy Dib. The  
robot's cloaking mode makes only the  
robot transparent, leaving Zim visible  
as he stomps down the street. And the  
robot must remain plugged in, because it  
came with no batteries. (Gir must keep  
plugging it into new outlets along the  
way.) At Dib's house, the robot fails, and  
Dib takes lots of photos. Zim destroys  
the robot, and Dib realizes that he had  
left the lens cap on his camera.



### EP17B (119B) "Lice"

There is a massive lice infestation at  
Skool. Countess von Vermittlstrasser the  
debaucher arrives and quarantines the  
entire student body. The only ones lice-  
free are Mr. Bitters and Zim, who are  
sent for study. Zim's flesh is analyzed and  
found to destroy lice, and the Countess,  
Dib, Melvin, and others fall through  
the Skool floor into the lice queen's lair.  
Zim is placed into a delousing gun and  
his body is squeezed and shredded into  
lice-killing goo used to defeat the queen  
and delouse the children.





### EP18A [114B] "Abducted"

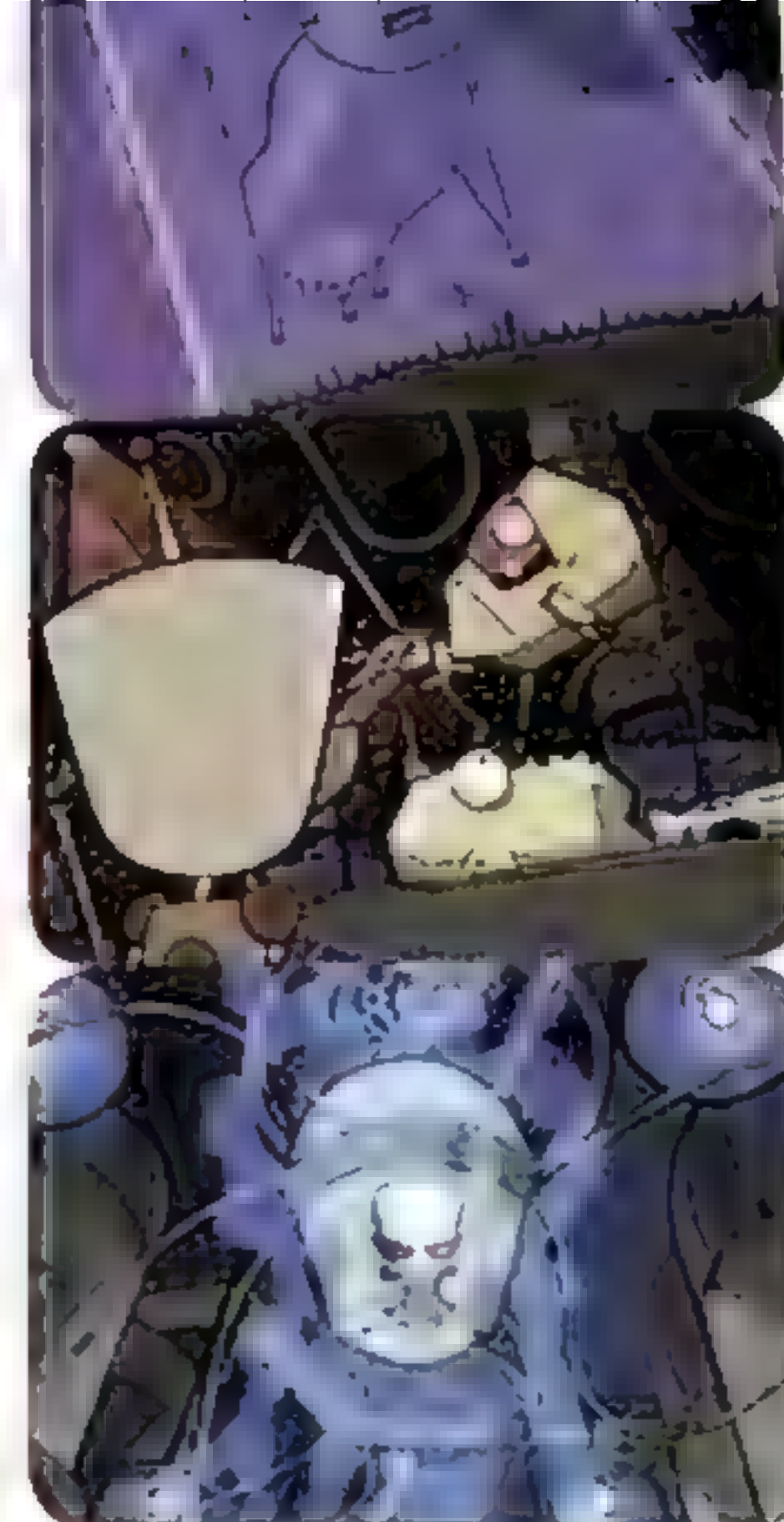
**Zim:** Girl! Remember with your brains. You must behave like a human dog monster. Do you understand?

Two aliens abduct Zim and Gir as examples of an Earth human and dog for their collection. Though they have spent hundreds of years harvesting samples from around the universe, all have escaped but one alien, which is too heavy to get out of its enclosure after having been fixed to too many objects, including a wrist watch, voice piping, and an issue of *Jenny the Hummel Mamma*. Zim and Gir escape the aliens and go home. The aliens move on to their next target, an Earth weasel, and proceed to abduct Dib.



### EP18B [117A] "The Sad, Sad Tale of Chickenfoot"

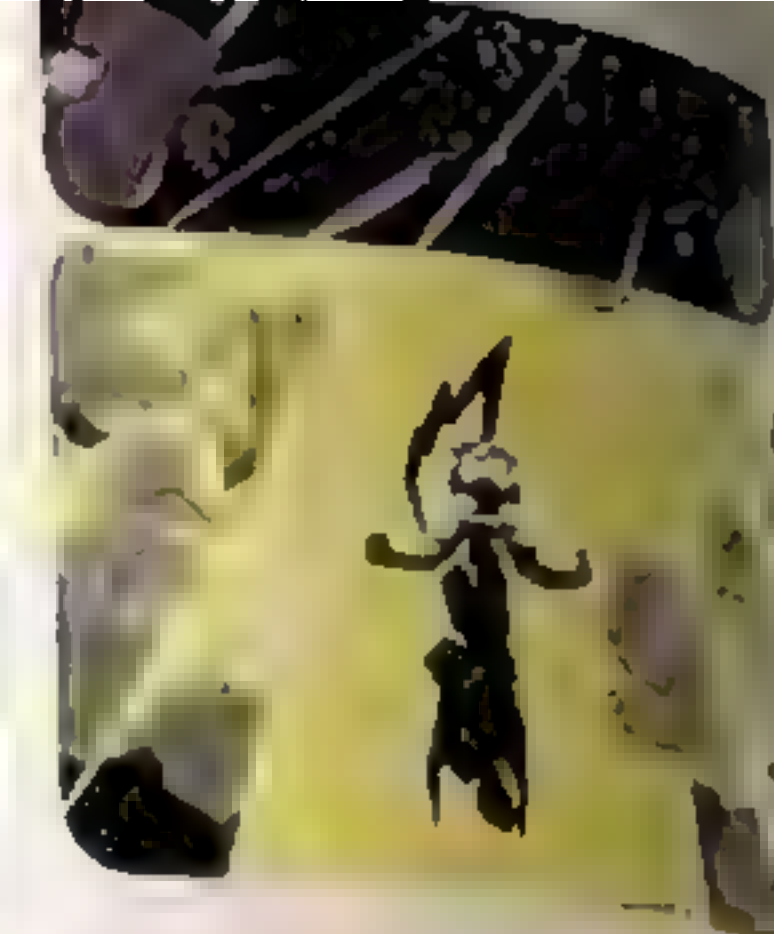
In the third Zim-less episode, Dib sets out to disprove the legend of Chickenfoot, who is obviously a man in a suit, because he sees the story as undermining the credibility of other paranormal cases that are legitimate. He succeeds in getting the man's costume zipper unstuck, which frees him from his suit, but then the news media concludes that all mysterious mysteries must also then be false. This is one of the grossest, creepiest episodes. The dirty chicken has a seccrecreet



### EP19A [117B] "Gir Goes Crazy and Stuff"

**Zim:** Once I've tainted the human's meat supply with filth, they will be ripe for conquest. Soon the name of Invader Zim will be synonymous with DOOKIE!

Zim decides that it is time to do something about Gir's malfunctioning, so he attempts to lock him into "duty mode" with a behavioral modulator. Soon Gir's functioning SIR brain recognizes that Zim's stupidity is a threat to the mission and decides to eliminate him. Zim manages to revert Gir back to his old malfunctioning self with the help of a police officer whose brain has been replaced with a squid's.



### EP19B [119A] "Dib's Wonderful Life of Doom"

In the Skool cafeteria, Zim is hit on the head with a muffin, and vows revenge on whoever threw it. He suspects it is not sure. Later that day, Zim is visited by other aliens who claim to also be battling the Irkens on their own planet. They grant Dib power to help him in his own fight. The next morning, Professor Membrane acknowledges that Dib's genetic makeup has evolved, and Gaz apologizes to him for being mean. Dib's first stop with his new power is Zim's house, where Zim gives himself up to the authorities and tells Gir to self-destruct. Next, Dib sets out to win more paranormal mysteries, proving the existence of ghosts, lake monsters, and more. He spends his life battling aliens and saving the planet many times over until he is an old man reminiscing on a talk show. The host asks one last question: Did Dib throw that muffin? And Dib admits that he did. The host and the entire audience turn into laughing Zims. It turns out that Dib's entire glorious life had been a simulation just to get him to admit to the muffin throw.



## INVADER ZIM EPISODES





## EP20 (120A & 120B) "The Hideous New Girl"

Dib at Skool, and the child-  
ren's traditional Valentine's  
Day. A new girl at Skool arrives  
Trix, saying that her dad is  
Dr. Zim's Weenies Corpora-  
tion. She weenies on the children  
and Zim, then throws  
her out. Zim is in love with her, and  
she finds out more about  
him.

Zim: I have come to accept your  
rejection of me. I congratulate you for  
acknowledging my superiority and  
treating me as your love-pig.  
**FEEL HONORED!**

Trix: He likes me as well. Fifty  
Zim had inadvertently caused  
Trix to become an elite  
member of Tak's planned  
invasion of Earth from Zim to curry  
favor with the Talles.

Trix: I'm a better invader than you'll  
ever be. The plan  
for this nasty rock will  
be the Talles, they'll have no  
chance to make me an invader.  
I'll use a magna pump to  
blast the core, but Dib, Gaz,  
and you will defeat Tak.



## EP21 (121A & 121B) "Backseat Drivers from Beyond the Stars"

The Almighty Talles are traveling unresist-  
antly close to Earth, and Zim implores them  
to stop by to see his latest diabolical plan to  
conquer mankind. It's a parasite that will  
eat the brains of all humans when let loose  
on the surface of Earth. Gir explodes out  
of a turkey that was sitting on a tray in the  
background.

Gir: It's me! I was the turkey all along!

Zim: I was wondering what that  
turkey was doing there.

Gir: I was the turkey! Moooooooo!

Zim: Yes, so you were.

Dib, having installed a spying device at  
Zim's base, and having recovered Tak's  
crashed ship, is now able to intercept  
information from Zim and interpret it. He  
learns about planet Vort, the top Irken mil-  
itary research prison-planet. Zim commu-  
nicates with Prisoner 777 on planet Vort,  
and receives the schematics for the *Massive*,  
the Talles's ship, which he had designed.  
Zim hacks into the controls of the *Massive*  
by locking on to the power core, and steers  
them toward Earth, all while a ship full of  
resistance fighters, known as the *Resisty*,  
follow and fire upon them. Dib then joins  
in the battle for control of the *Massive*  
by using Tak's ship to also hack control,

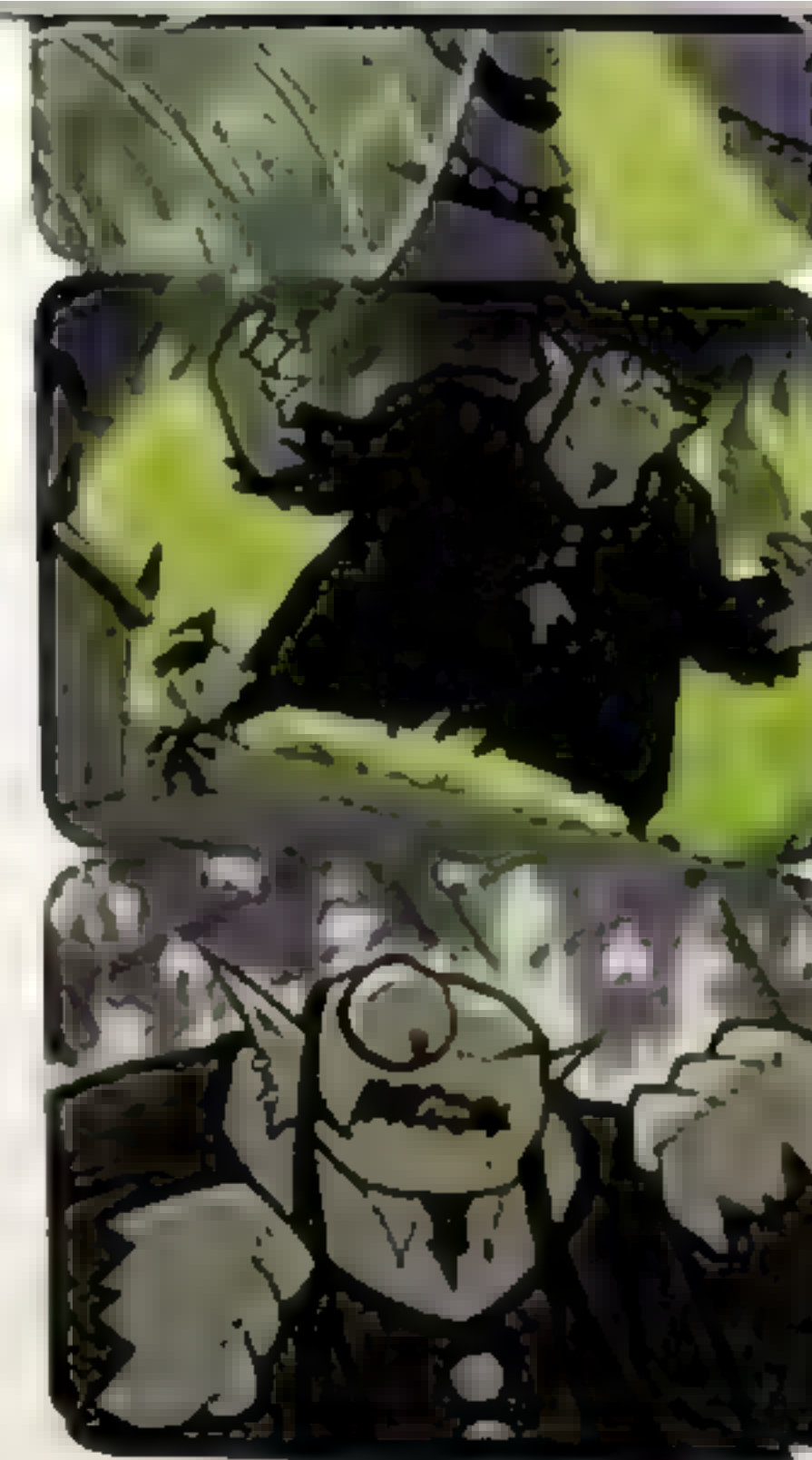


attempting to steer it away from Earth.  
Meanwhile at Zim's base, the massive para-  
site is waking up since Gir did not maintain an  
proper control levels, and the *Resisty* partners  
have gone hardware, attracting the neighbors'  
attention by chewing on a child's head.  
After discovering Dib's spy device, Zim  
remotely activates Tak's ship's security sys-  
tem and wrests away control of the *Massive*.  
However, the Talles have realized that their  
power core is being controlled from some-  
where on Earth, and via teleportation, they  
swap the *Massive*'s power core with that of  
the *Resisty* ship. Zim, still thinking that he  
has the *Massive* in tow, prepares to show the  
Talles his parasite and crush Dib.

Zim: Mankind ends now! And to  
make it even sweeter, I'll land the  
*Massive* right on top of your landing-  
pad-sized monster of a head, which is  
disturbingly large.

Dib: NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO  
and quit making fun of my head  
AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH

Once losing control of their own ship, the  
*Resisty* escape, and activate the Shrinky  
Self-Destruct. Just as Dib is about to  
be crushed by the *Resisty* ship, it has  
shrunk to the size of a fly, then pops in a  
tiny explosion. Meanwhile, Zim's brains  
are being eaten by the parasite, and the  
Almighty Talles steer their repaired ship  
away from Earth.



## EP22A (122B) "Mortos der Soulstealer"

Dib summons Mortos der Soulstealer  
from the graveyard to steal the soul of  
Zim, as his other methods of defeating  
Zim haven't been working. Mortos  
doesn't feel like stealing the alien's soul  
and tries to leave, but according to Dib's  
pamphlet, Mortos must grant the wish  
of one mortal before he returns to the  
underworld. Mortos says the pamphlet  
is stupid, but still goes with Dib, saying  
that he is tired and must recharge. Mor-  
tos eats fast food, tries on rubber pants,  
goes to a carnival, and cuddles puppies  
to recharge. At last charged up, Mortos  
grants some other guy a wish for some  
ice cream, and then returns to his spooky  
home for another thousand years. Dib  
gets arrested for his earlier loitering in  
the pet store.



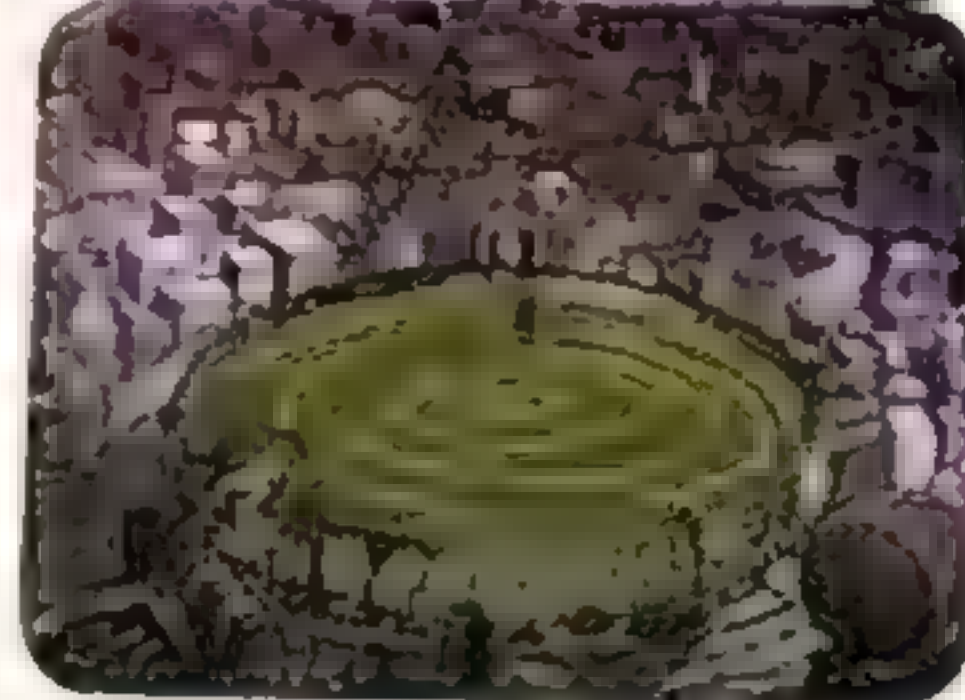


### EP22B (124A) "Zim Eats Waffles"

Dib asks Grr to place a secret video recording device in Zim's house and Grr agrees. Back in his bedroom, Dib monitors the activity in Zim's kitchen, where Grr has prepared waffles and Zim decides to eat waffles to build up a tolerance for blizzards in his food. Dib's recording device is in repair mode, so he can only watch live and hope to catch Zim's next secret evil plan, but every time he calls a Swollen Football member to watch the activity in Zim's kitchen, such as defeating squid attacks, Zim, Dib, and Nick (Zim's experimental test-human prototype) are not enjoying waffles.

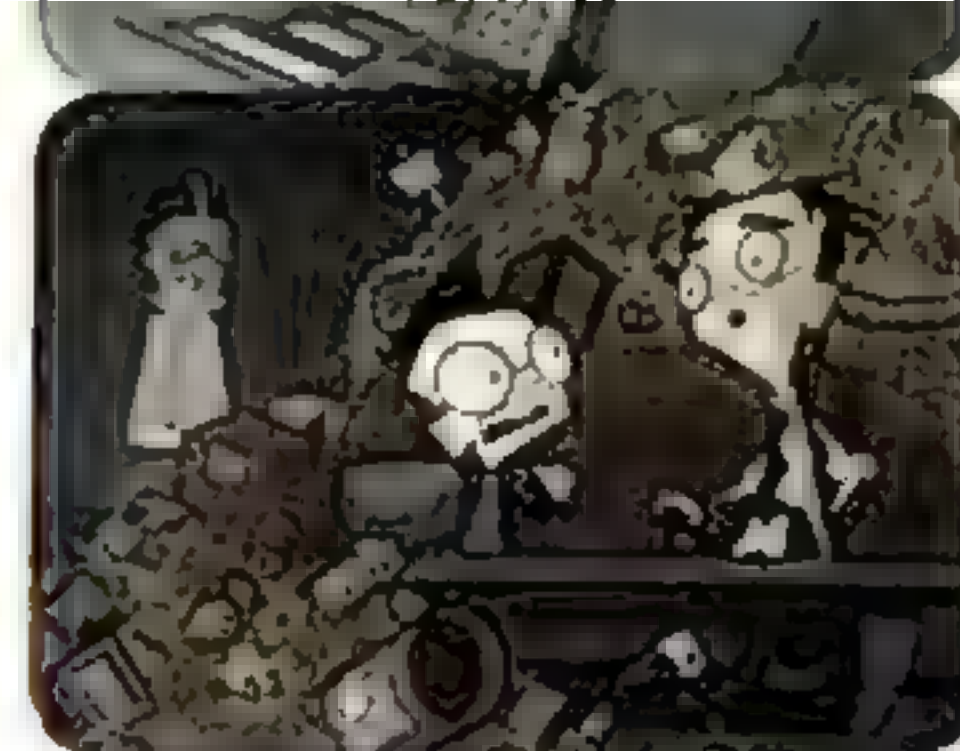
### EP23A (122A) "The Girl Who Cried Gnome"

A girl with cookies comes to Zim's door. Zim releases the robot gopher. The girl's foot gets stuck in the gopher mound, and the news media and a crowd gather with cameras in the front yard. Dib realizes an opportunity to expose Zim on national TV. President Man from President Land comes to give a speech. Zim eventually tries the girl herself just to get everyone to leave. Dib ends up stuck himself in the gopher mound.



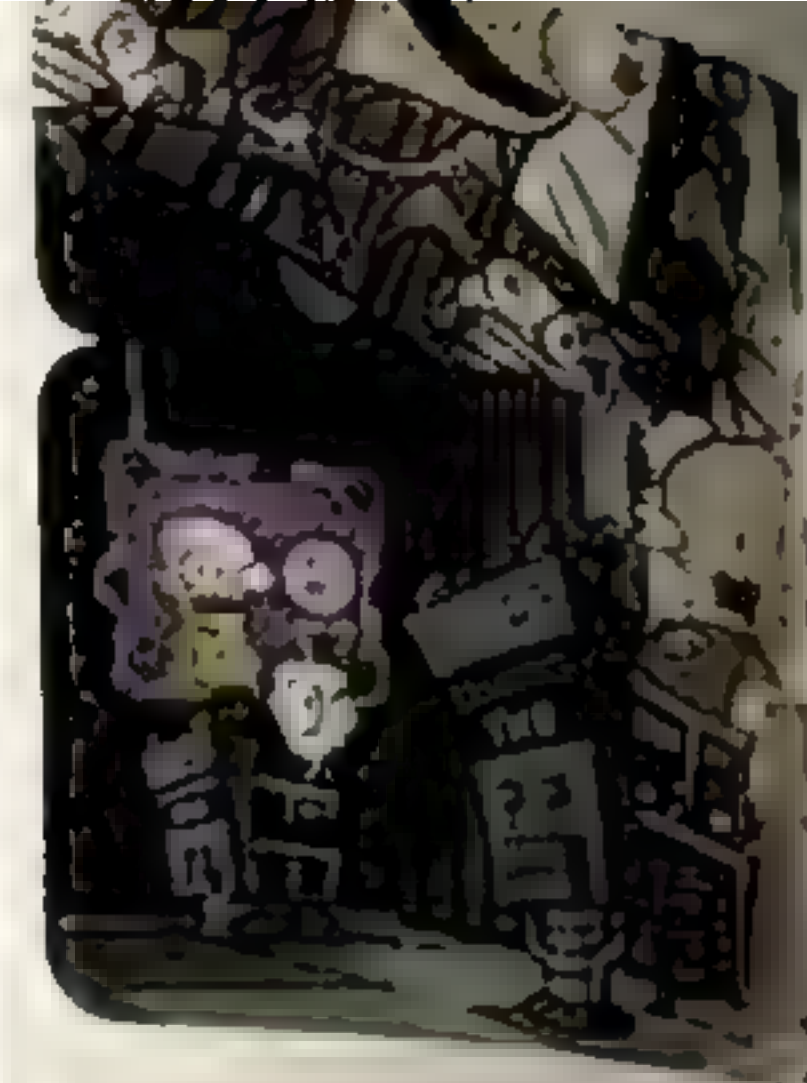
### EP23B (124B) "Dibship Rising"

Dib works on Tak's ship. To stop the ship from always attacking him, Dib decides to delete Tak's personality, which was downloaded into the ship, and replace it with his own. The ship thinks that it is Dib, which causes problems, then Zim takes over and attempts to drop Dib into the city cesspit. Dib implores the ship to remember his life, which works enough to save him from death, but then the ship sits there, dangling over the pit despondent, concluding that it's a loser.



### EP24A (126A) "Uindicated!"

Dib is sent to the school counselor Mr. Dwick, who says that he also believes in aliens and agrees to help Dib expose Zim with a trap set in the woods. Mr. Dwick and Dib pretend to be aliens and communicate with Zim. They promise to give Zim super weapons. After waiting into the night in the woods, Mr. Dwick reveals to Dib that he didn't really believe in aliens but was just playing along to gain Dib's trust so that he could share what is really bothering him. Dib is crestfallen. Zim finally arrives in the woods looking for the super weapons that he was promised. Two real aliens show up, and Mr. Dwick is excited and leaves with them, along with the video evidence of the encounter. Before leaving, however, the two aliens gave Zim a load of super weapons that they just had lying around.



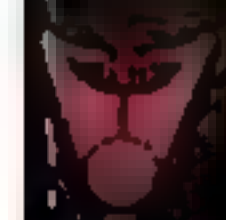
### EP24B (126B) "The Uoting of the Doomed"

At Skool, the student body president lapses in her school spirit and is recruited by the Skool forces, triggering an immediate election for a new president. Volunteers to run include Zim and a drooling boy, Willy.

**Zim:** As president, I will ensure that all mankind HAS ITS LEGS SAWED OFF! Eh... uh, and replaced with legs of pure gold. Yes, and I will grant you the power to fire lasers from your head. Dib realizes that Zim is promising anything and lying, and that he will win unless Willy gets help. He often in services as Willy's campaign manager.

**Dib:** Pardon me, but if you don't tackle the real issues, Zim is going to win the election and eradicate all human life!

Willy wins with Dib's help, but is then immediately brainwashed to spread Skool propaganda by shrouded figures in the principal's office. Zim snidely thanks Dib for sparing him that fate.



# INVADER ZIM EPISODES





### EP25 (125A & B) "Gaz, Master of Pork"

Gaz, the ancient spellcaster, has a few spells, but they are all out of order. Dibs, the alien prince, has two remaining spells. He tests a spell on Gaz. The spell makes Gaz's taste like pork. Gaz proceeds with the spell. Gaz and Gaz vows to make the planet eating the pizza flavor that Dibs realizes he needs to reverse the spell. Dibs and Gaz fly through the planet of the Shadow-lands. She takes the terrible spell, which she passes to Dibs. Later at Bloaty's

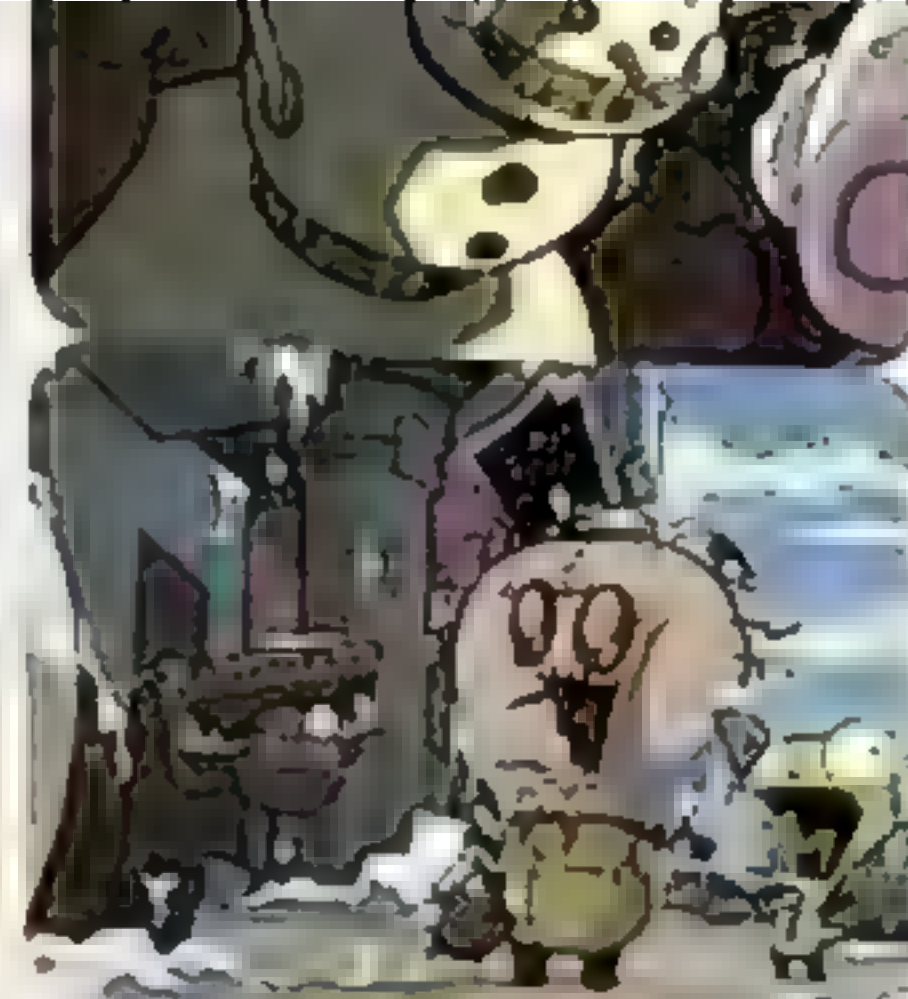
**Professor Membrane:** Sorry about you and turning you into a freak, honey. But for the name of science, where's your brother? In a pig world nether-land out toilets with his

**Professor Membrane:** HAHA! Funny child



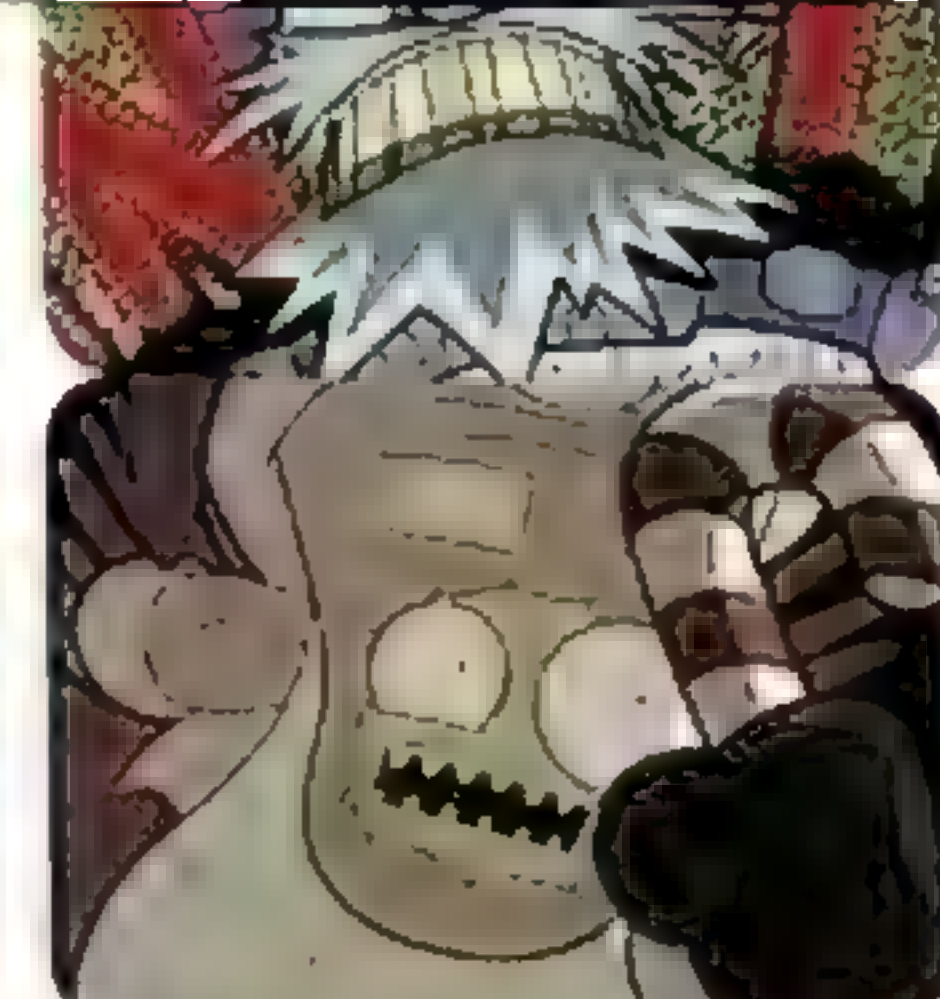
### EP26 (123A & B) "The Frycook What Came from All That Space"

At Skool, a giant alien monster crashes through the ceiling and flies away with Zim. It's Sizz-Lorr, the Irken who Zim had escaped from on planet Foodcourtia. Before the first episode, Zim had been punished for single-handedly destroying Operation Impending Doom 1. His punishment was to be re-encoded as a food service drone on the Irken snacking planet. Fry-lord Sizz-Lorr is intent on making Zim suffer through working in the restaurant, especially as the twenty-year long Foodening approaches, a frenzy of snacking so great, that its gravitational pull prevents anybody from leaving the planet for its duration. With only one day left before the Foodening, Zim learns from Eric, the blob-customer, that the security system can be beaten if the escapee hides buried within enough layers of filthy trash in a garbage container. Zim formulates a plan instead to be disguised as Eric's food, and escapes after being eaten whole, layered inside the filth of Eric's body. Sizz-Lorr discovers the escape and a chase ensues, with Zim fleeing back to Earth and Sizz-Lorr stuck on Foodcourtia for another twenty-year Foodening.



### EP27 (130B & 131A) "The Most Horrible X-Mas Ever"

Zim sees Santa everywhere and how much everyone loves them, so he abducts a mall Santa and drains his brains of all Santa knowledge. Soon, Zim, dressed as Santa, appears and everyone is joyful for his return, including President Man, who steps aside for Santa's reign to begin. Zim claims a new world order. It also turns out that Professor Membrane hates Santa and has devoted a portion of his life to destroying Santa. At his fascist-y rally, Santa Zim announces a new Christmas tradition, the Yuletide Helping of Santa to Build a Giant Teleporter Capable of Sending All Humans to Their Doom. However, Zim's Santa suit begins to malfunction and engulf

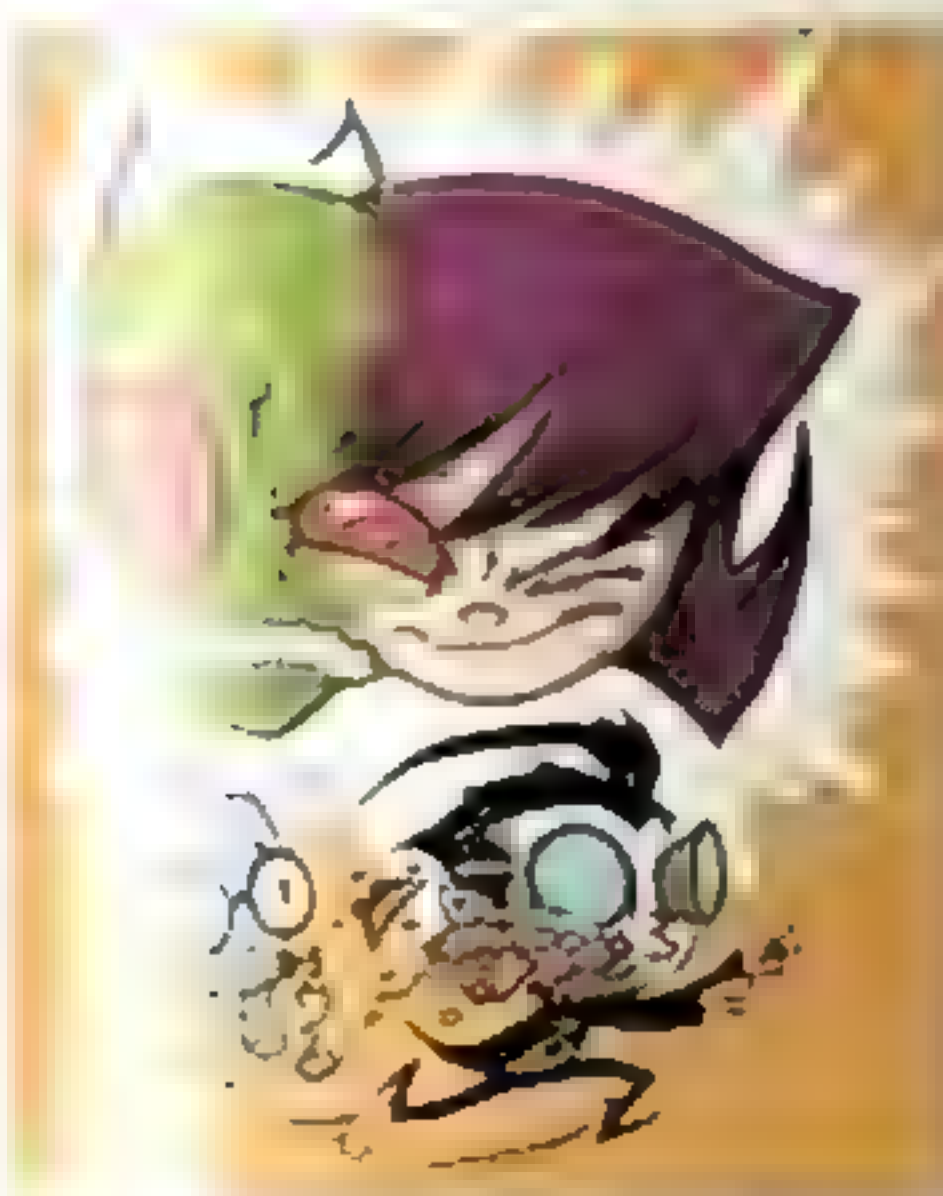
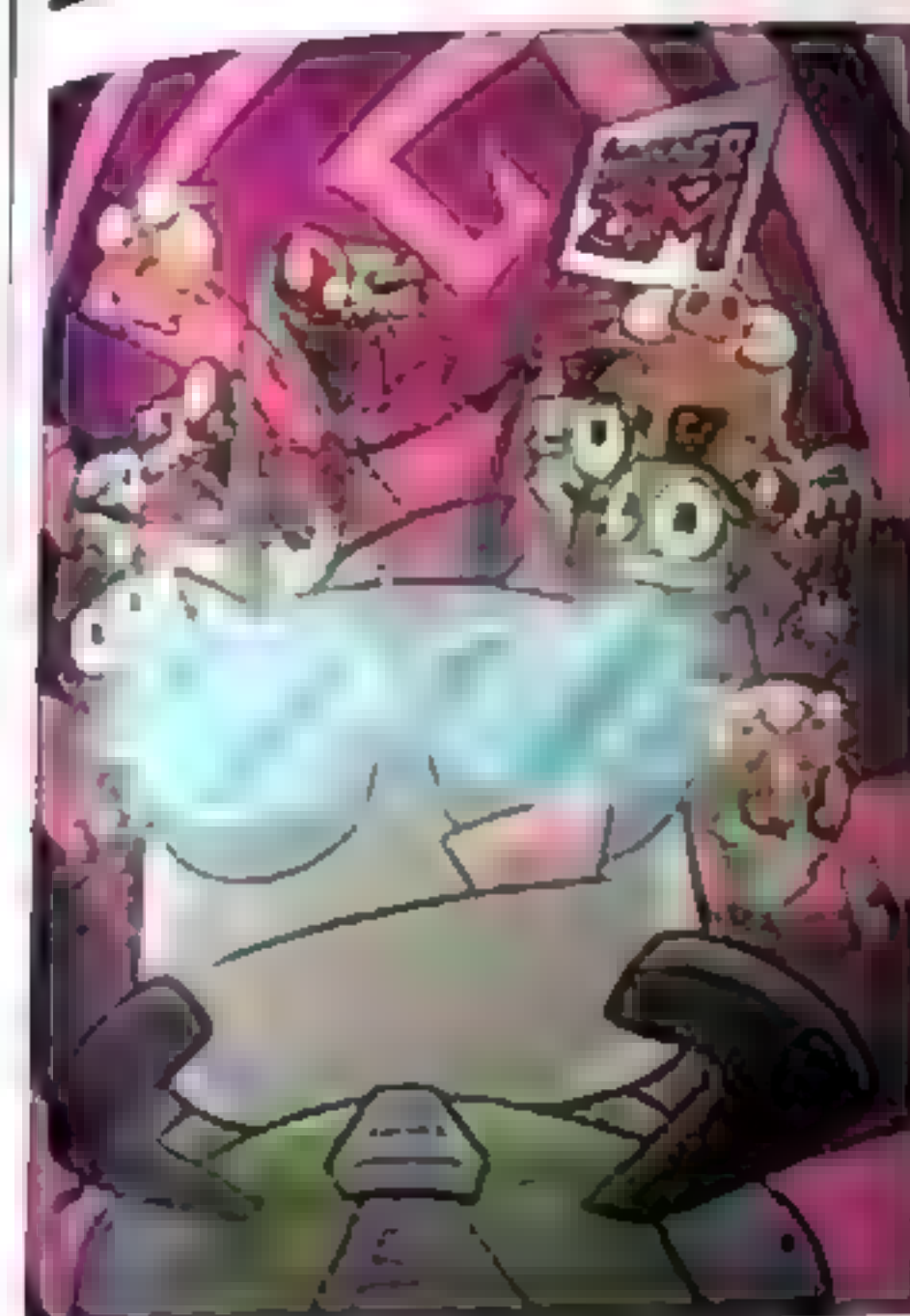
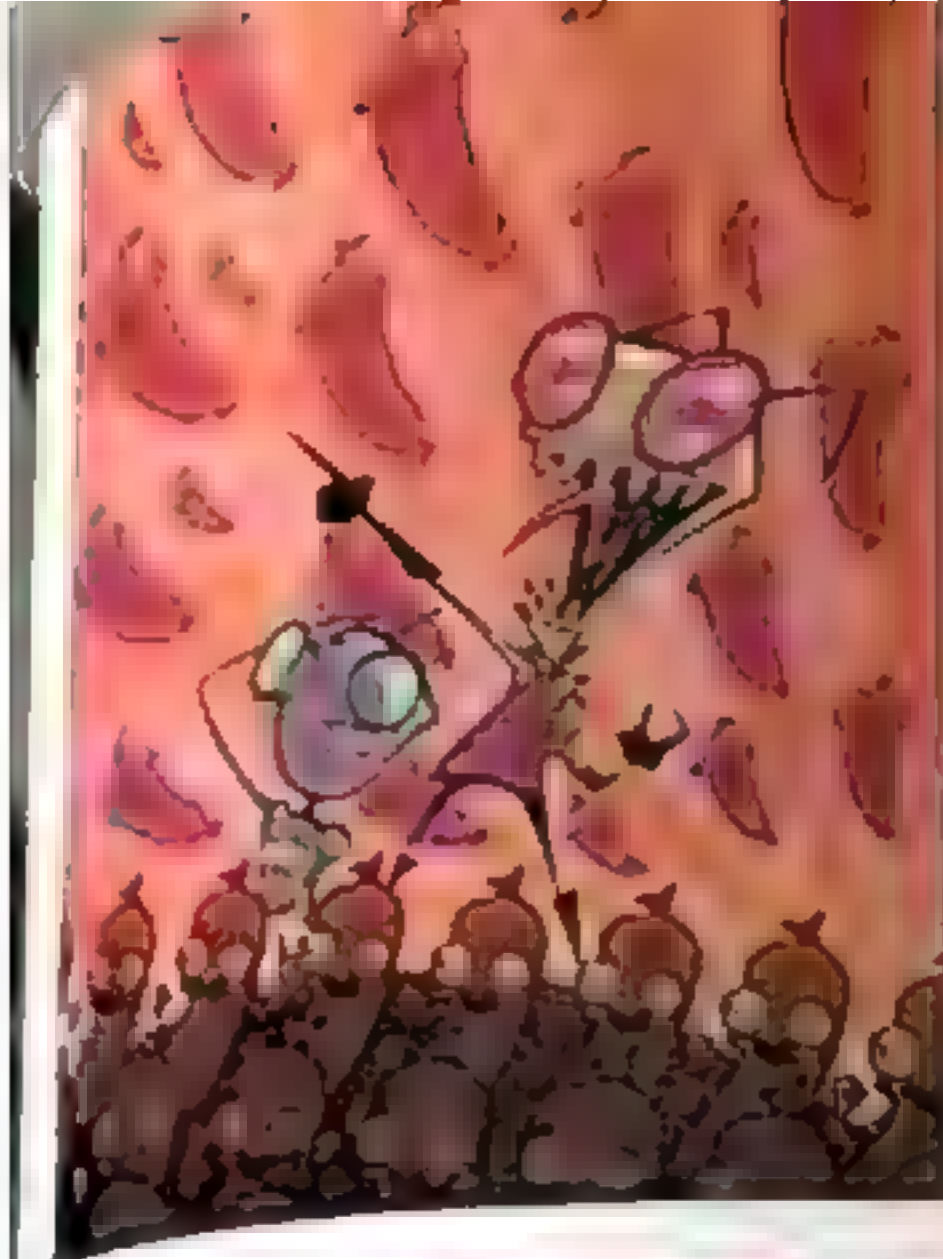


him, making him do Christmas things. Dibs, dressed as an elf, tries to thwart Zim but is dumped in a frozen waste land and trapped in a Jungle Jail until Gaz rescues him in Tak's ship, so that she can beat him up. Professor Membrane gives Dibs access to his anti-Santa arsenal that he created when he was a kid. Meanwhile, the Santa suit fully engulfs Zim before he can send people to their doom. Dibs flies in and blasts Santa with his anti-Santa mega mech robot, which makes the Santa suit grow giant, mutate, and fight back. Zim escapes the suit and Dibs launches the Santa suit into space. The suit then grows strong in space and returns every year on Christmas Eve, hungry for milk and cookies, for the next two million years.









## 4: A SECRET COMICS LABORATORY

### WRITING AND DESIGNING THE ZIM COMICS

#### A Downer Ending?

Despite the monumental efforts behind the scenes, *Zim* the series was a short-lived beast. Nickelodeon produced two seasons (twenty episodes in season one, and seven in season two) for a total of twenty-seven episodes, and only aired about three quarters of them during its initial run of 2001–02. Low ratings and the relatively expensive production costs for *Zim* were the one-two punches of doom for the series. Nickelodeon's sister channel Nicktoons finally broadcast the remaining unaired episodes in 2006.

What seems like a downer ending, wasn't. Throughout its brief run and well after cancellation, *Zim* received positive press and was showered with awards and nominations, winning a Primetime Emmy, an Annie Award, and a World Animation Celebration award. The *Zim* crew was also nominated

for six more individual Annies and a Golden Reel Award for the sound design from Motion Picture Sound Editors, USA.

Beyond the recognition, *Zim* developed a cult following, buoyed by the fan infrastructure developing on the Internet and the DVD release of a collection of episodes in 2004 by Anime Works and Nickelodeon, followed by several more collections in various formats. Despite cancelling the show, Nickelodeon licensees kept a healthy merchandising flow into stores, which fed the *Zim* love through malls nationwide via character toys, shirts, and techotchkies.

As late as 2011, there was even enough critical mass among *Zim* fans to justify its own convention in Atlanta, dubbed *InvaderCON*, which was followed by a second event in 2012, *InvaderCON II: DOOMCON*, which took place in Los Angeles. Both featured special

(Continued on page 100)

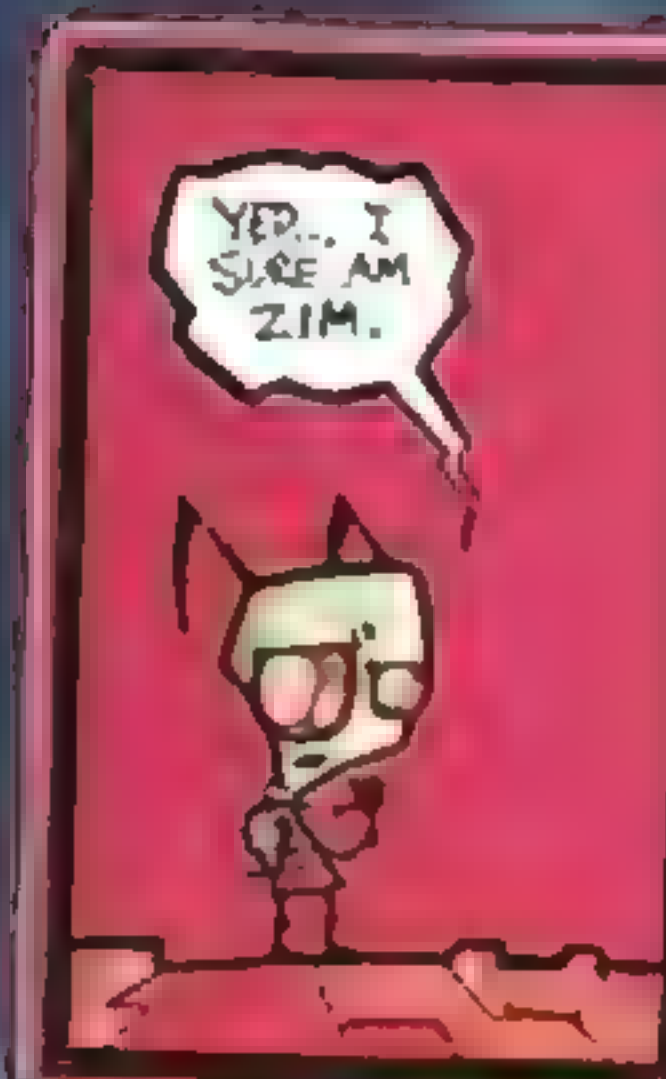


Opposite: *Invader Zim* issue #1 variant cover art by Vincent Perea.

Left, top to bottom: issue #1 variant cover art by Aaron Alexovich with Simon Truett, issue #1 variant cover art by Ian McGinty with Fred C. Stresing, and issue #21 cover art by Dave Croeland.

Overleaf: Two page *Zim* comic by Zhonen for *Nickelodeon Magazine*.





YEP... I  
SURE AM  
ZIM.



NYEHHEH...



AND DO YOU KNOW HOW  
I KNOW I AM ZIM?

SQUEAK!

MAGICAL  
GOBLIN  
BABIES???



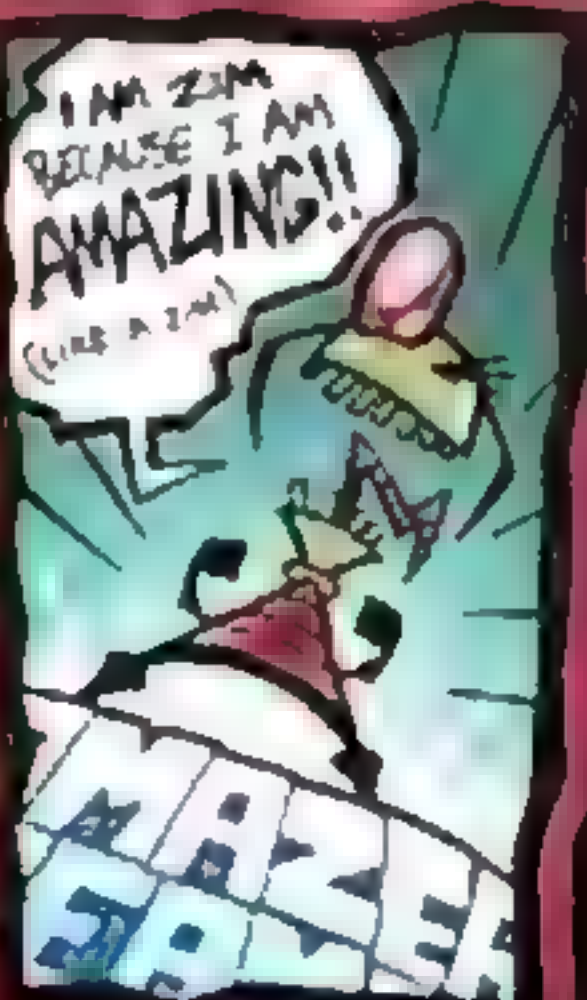
NOOO... YOU ARE  
BOTH WRONG

SO MORE BY MEANS



SHOCK!

DISBELIEF!



I AM ZIM  
BECAUSE I AM  
AMAZING!!  
(LIKE A ZIM)

MAZE



I HAVE DISCOVERED  
THE ONE FLAW IN  
MY PLAN TO  
CONQUER THE  
EARTH!

TELL ME  
ALL ABOUT IT.



ARE YOU  
READY TO  
HEAR  
THE  
SECRET?



IT'S ALL IN  
THE THUMBS!



SEE, I'VE BEEN  
WIGGLING MY  
FINGER LIKE THIS



BUT HUMANS, THEY  
WIGGLE 'EM LIKE THIS!



NOW, WITH MY HUMAN  
DISGUISE PERFECTED,  
I CAN TAKE  
OVER THE  
EARTH!  
NEAT!

NOW.



TO CONQUER!

WOOOOOOOOO!!

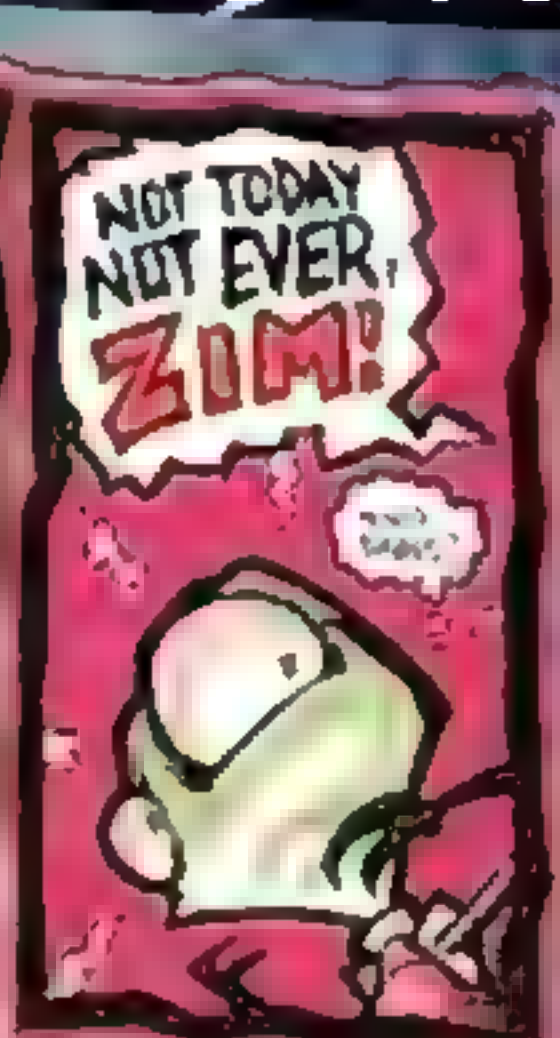
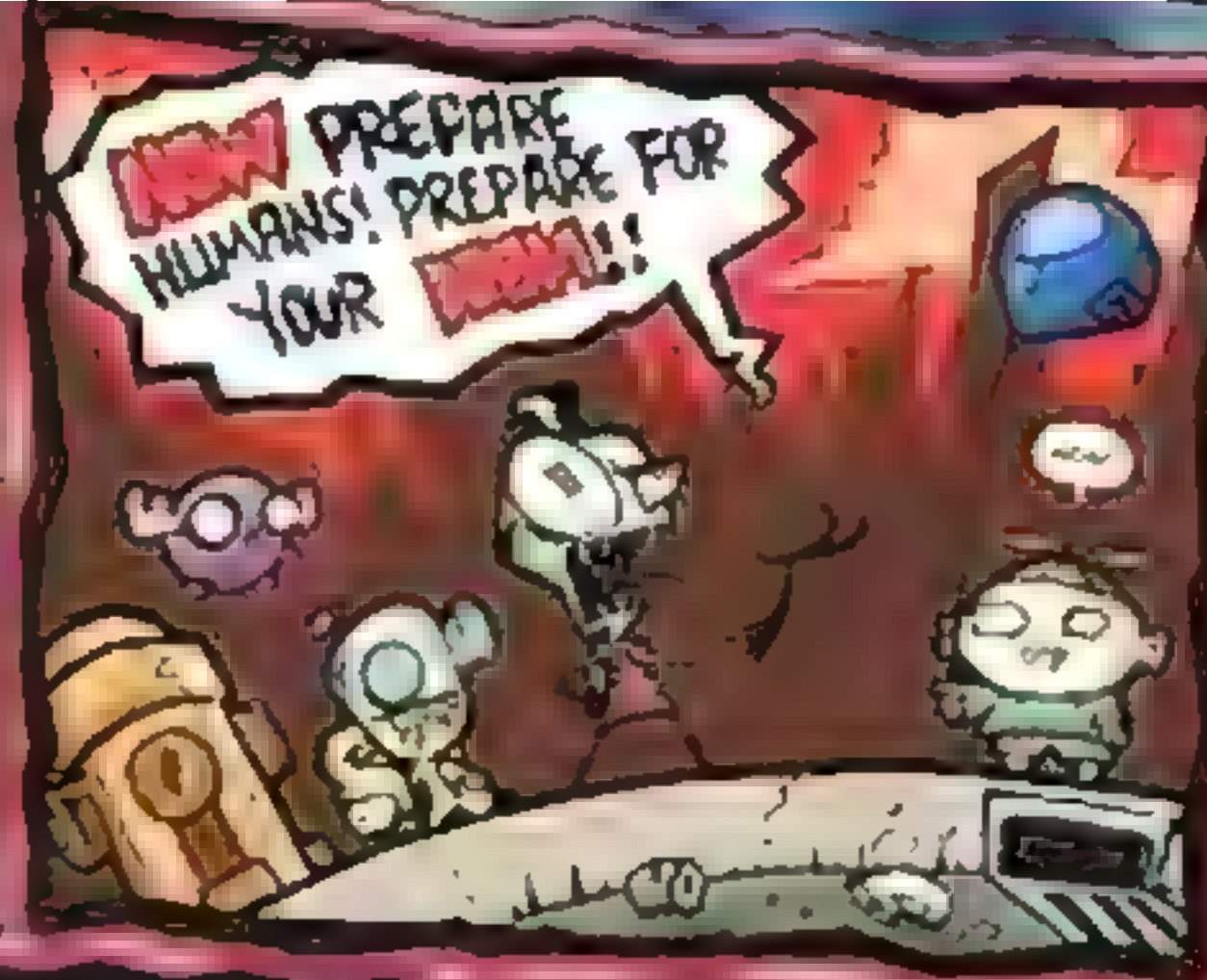


BUT I JUST MADE THIS  
BURRITO! IT SO WARM  
AND BEANY!

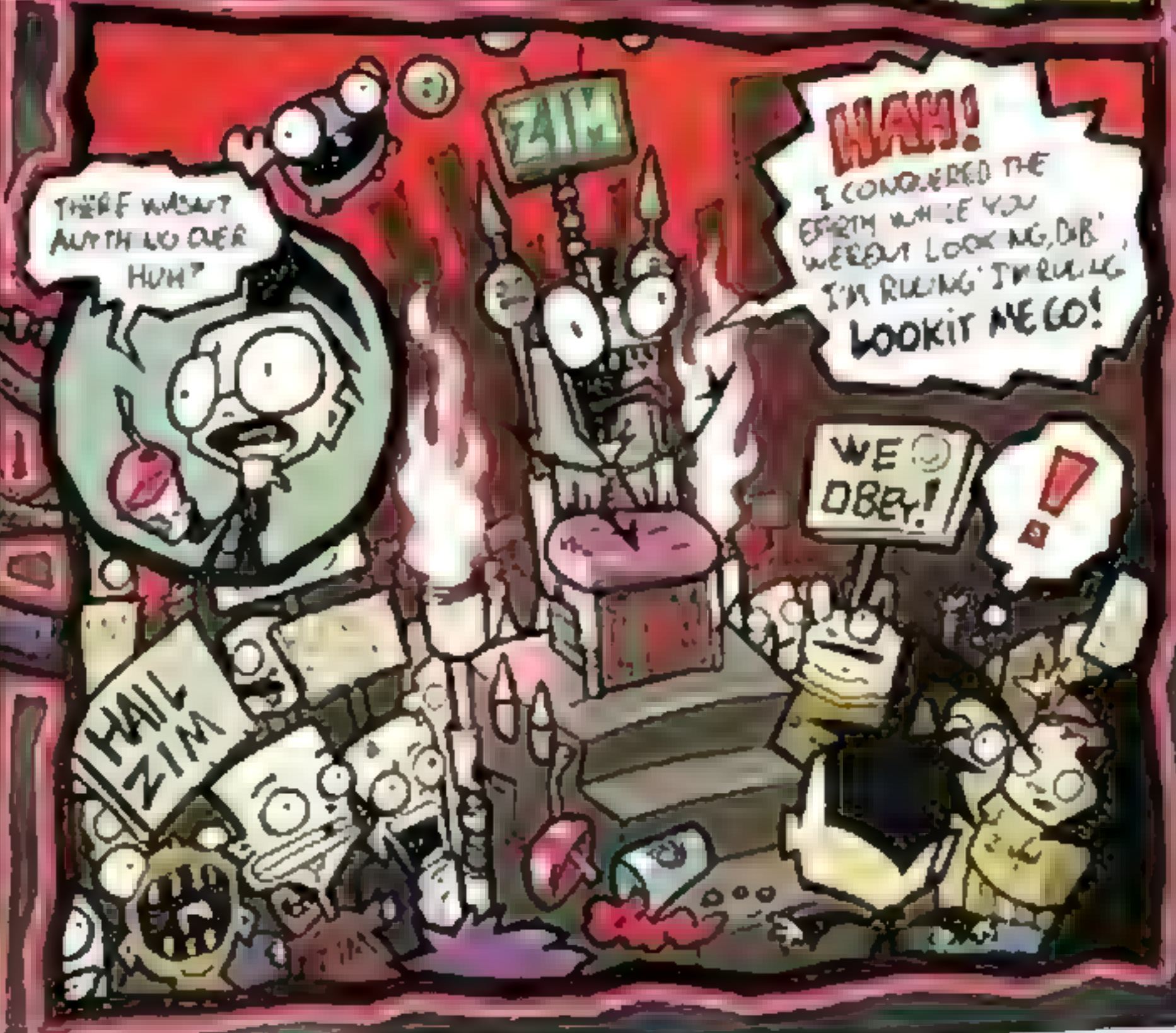
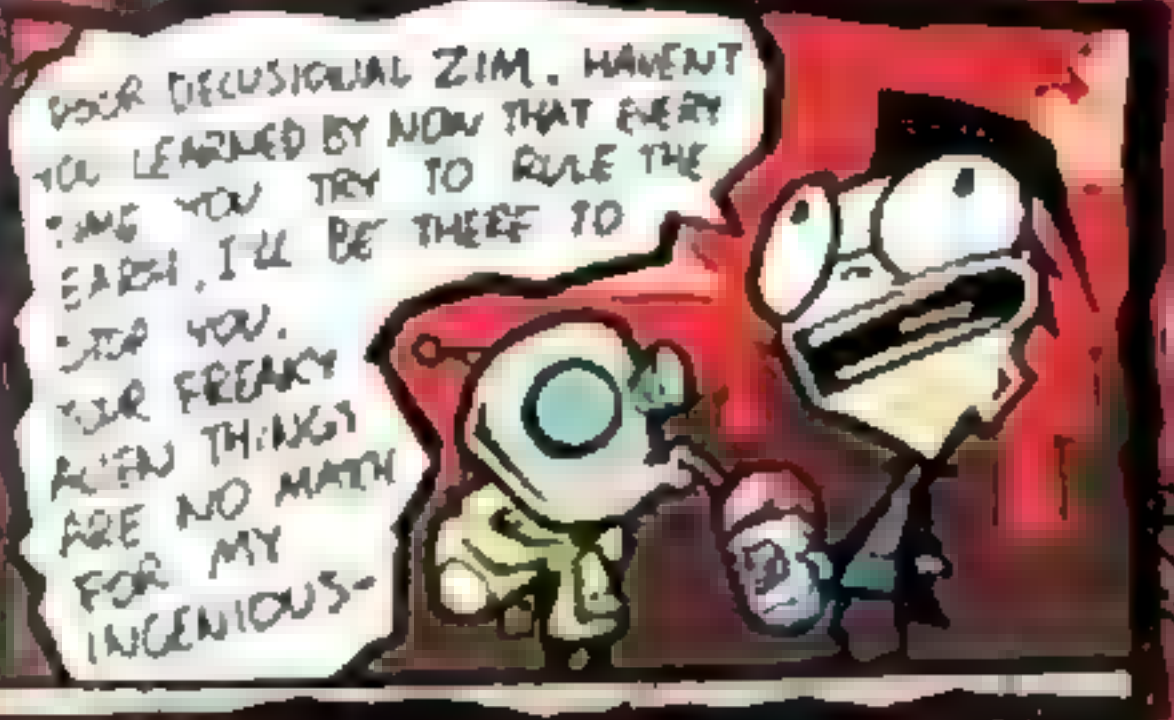
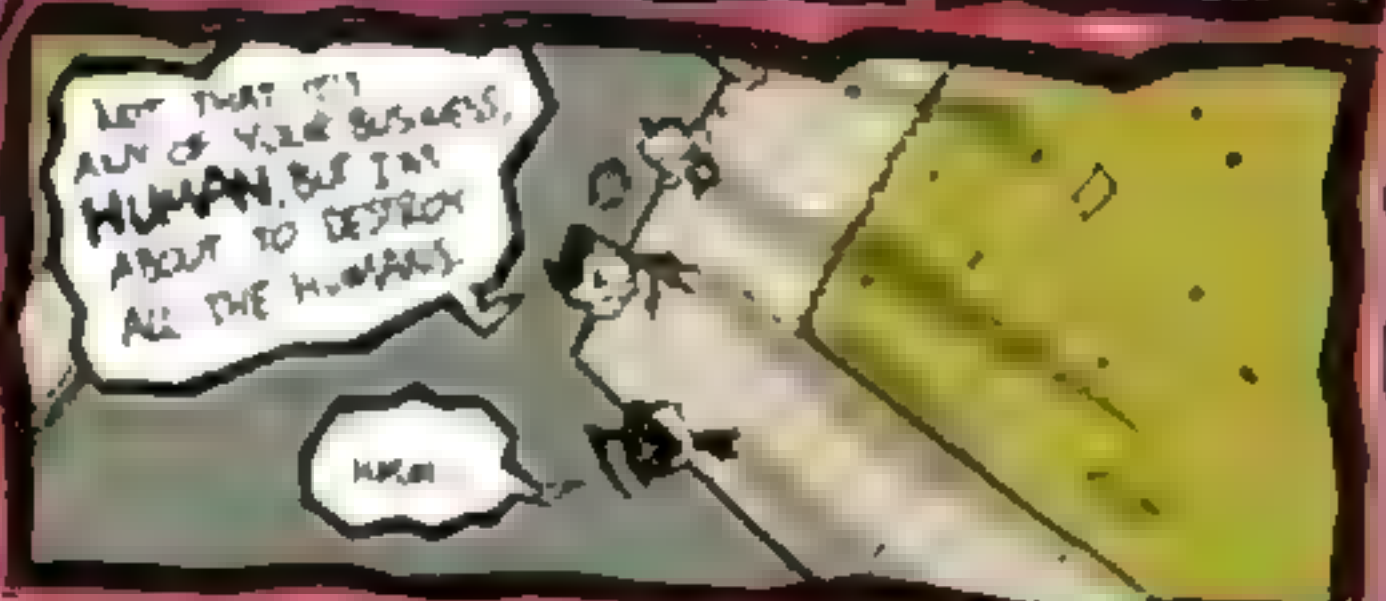
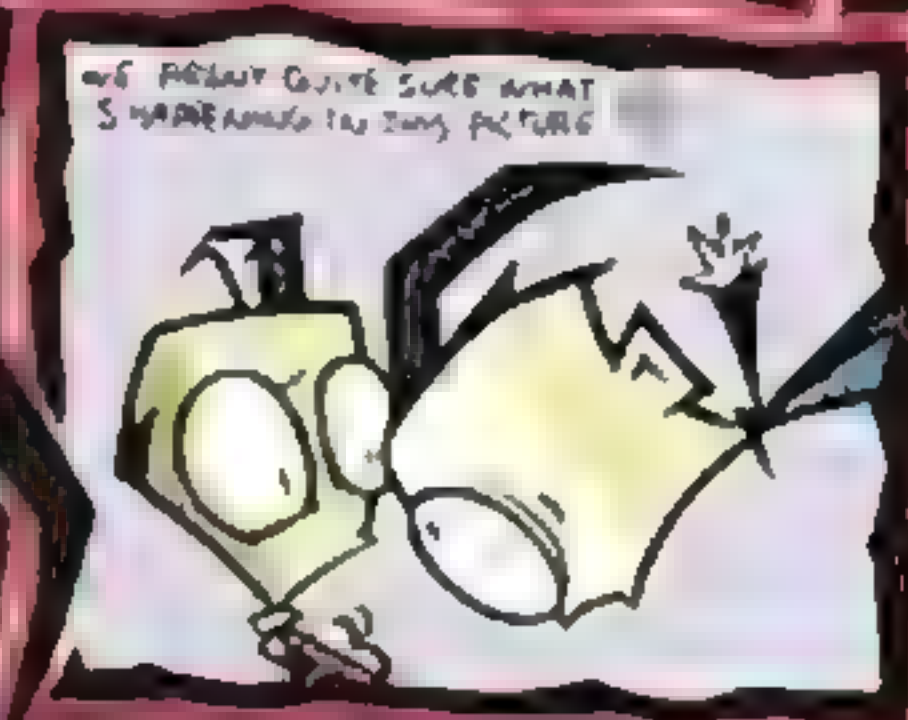
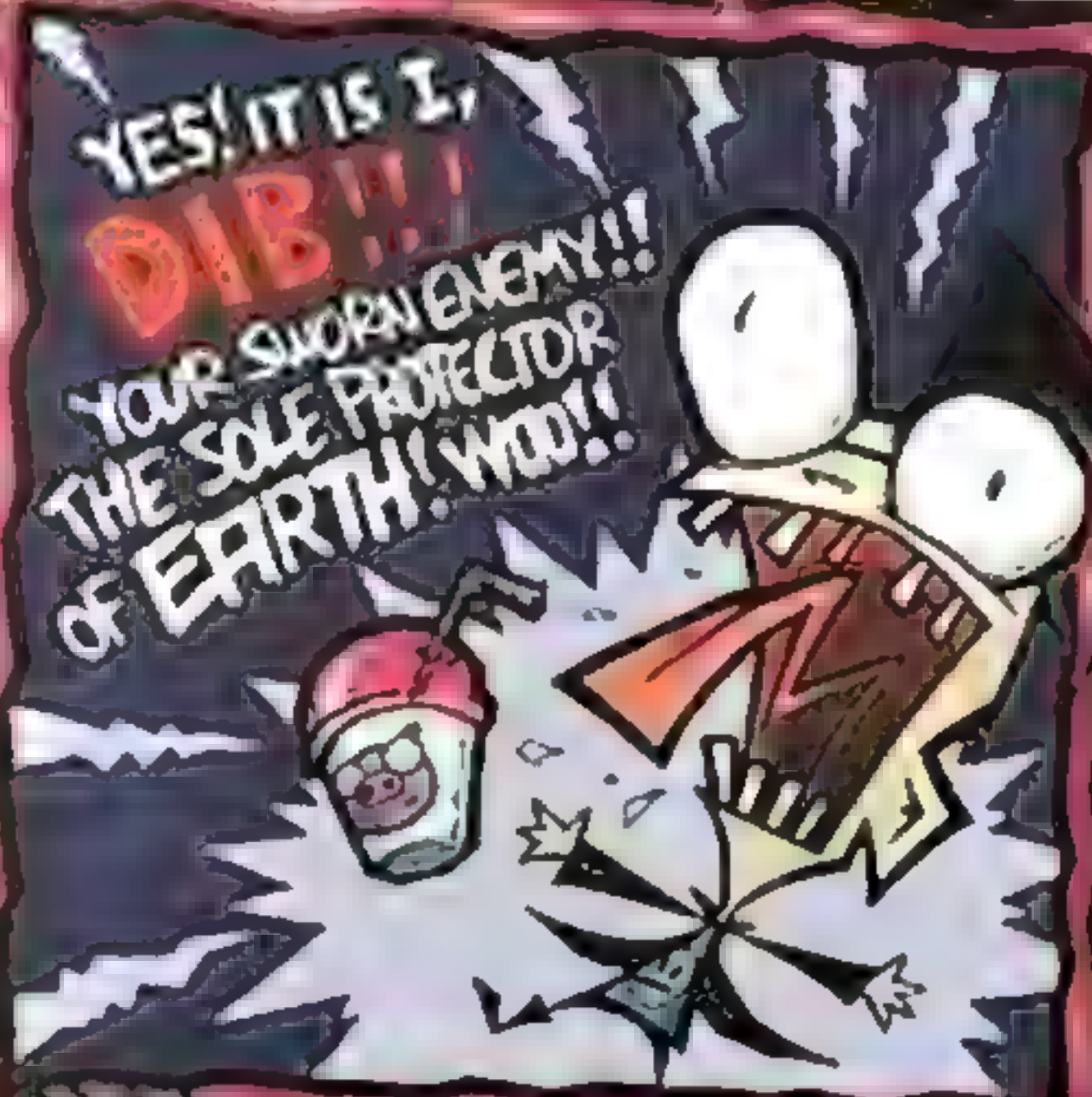
GIR!!... FINE,  
BUT HURRY UP!  
I WANNA RULE  
THE EARTH!



4  
HUNDRED  
BURRITOS  
LATER...



ARE YOU READY FOR MORE YELLING?!







guest artists and voice actors from the crew—even Jhonen himself for the California event.

A single stand-alone *Zim* comic by Jhonen was published in *Nickelodeon Magazine*, which was the lone *Zim*-related comics example until 2015, when Oni Press released a new series of *Zim* stories. The *Zim* energy had built to a cresting wave.

### Un-Death of Zim

**Jhonen Vasquez [series creator]:** I think we saw it coming, because from the moment that it was released, *Invader Zim* made absolutely no sense on Nickelodeon because it didn't have a home. The original idea was to have it be part of this more mature, action-oriented block to kind of compete with some of the stuff that Cartoon Network was doing. And it never came to pass, so *Zim* was the only product of that experiment. For

the duration of its run, it was in between *Rocket Power* and *Fairly OddParents*, and it just didn't make sense. Alarm bells were ringing from day one, and I think we were surprised that it lasted as long as it did! At some point we were like, "How long can we do this before we get kicked out?" We had to make the show be what it was going to be.

Jhonen did keep creatively busy during those post-*Zim* years. While developing a project that didn't get produced at Disney, Jhonen jumped at the chance to create character designs for *Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja* which premiered on Disney XD in 2012.

**Jhonen:** After *Zim* I definitely wanted to take a break from animation, especially kids' animation. But it's just one of those things, though, that

if you give me the opportunity to create a new project, my brain can't help but want to see what I can come up with, because I just love dreaming stuff up.

I was developing a series over at Disney at the time, and it was taking so long and the process was just so grueling, and Randy popped up. It was just an opportunity to do some character design—wasn't really involved beyond sort of rehashing the show. But I jumped at the chance to work on something like that, just to kind of feel like something was actually going to happen, that there was going to be movement on something. It was nice to be able to see a show come out and to be able to say "Look, there is something I worked on, there it is." Versus just being trapped in development hell. So Randy was me wanting to work on something that was actually going to get made.

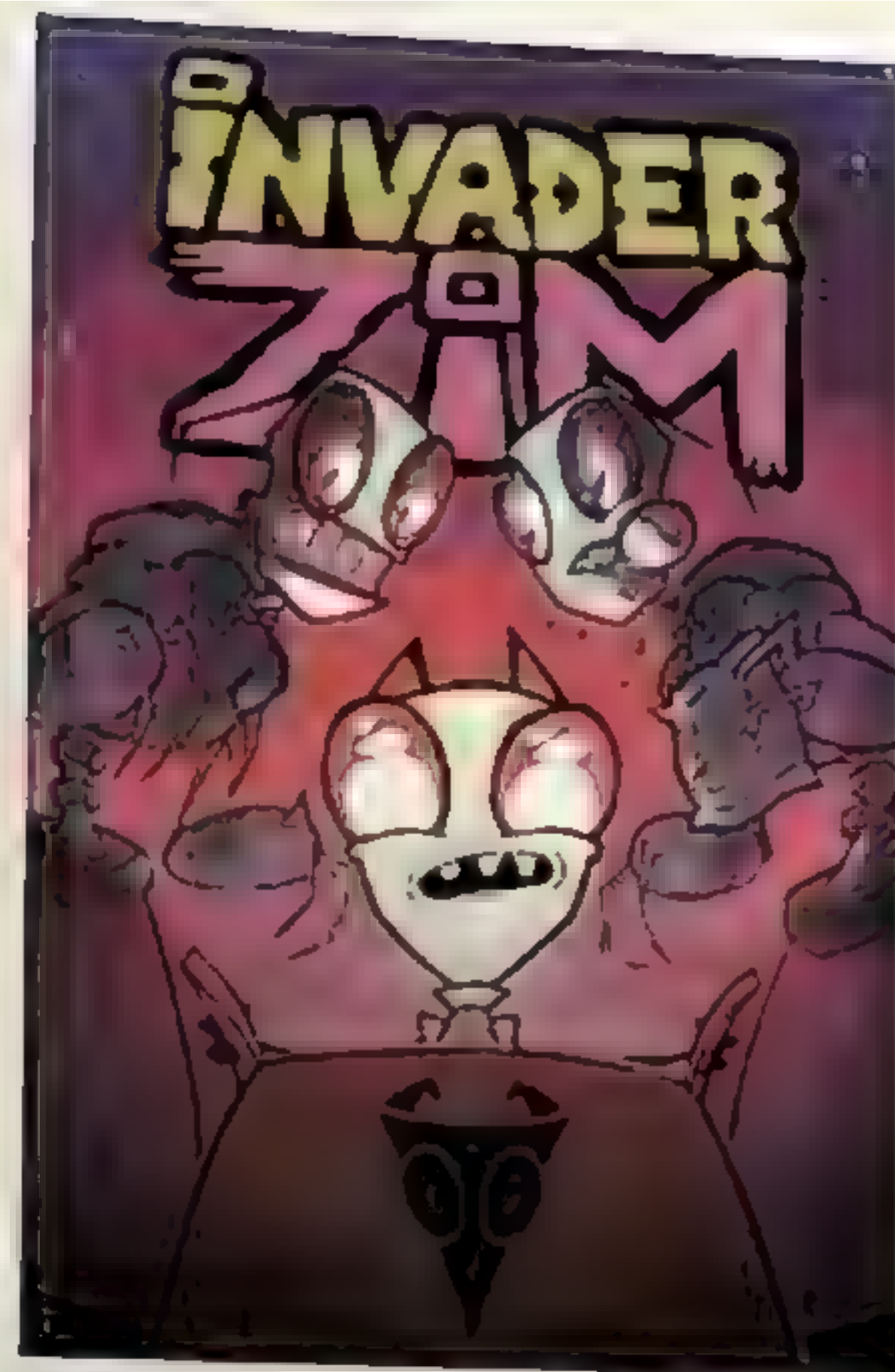
**Above:** Jhonen's thumbnail sketches for a comics cover idea, and the cover art to *Invader Zim* #1 by Aaron Kurovich with Ricki Serrano.





Jhonen: Zim projects included developing work for a wide range of audiences as well, but they too did not get a green light.

Jhonen: There were a few other projects in there. I was working on a couple of segments for a *Metal* movie that was being produced by Warner Bros. It was spearheaded by Tim Miller, who went on to direct *Deadpool*, and David Fincher was involved in this thing. It was great; it wasn't going to be a horror and sci-fi anthology, and I was going to be one of the directors right alongside Guillermo del Toro. It was really cool, but it really didn't have a chance. For all the things that made it great, it was all the things that doomed it, basically. It was supposed to be a theatrical run, an anthology—all sorts of things that this country has still not been able to make successful, which is really too bad.



Back at Disney, Jhonen cocreated and developed a pitch for a series with longtime friend Jenny Gohlberg called *Very Important House* through 2016 which, again, did not get a green light.

Jhonen: *Very Important House* was the definition of heartbreak. Since *Zim*, this was the first time that it felt like a project that was worth all of the toil and misery of working in animation. Jenny and I put so much of ourselves into it, and, like what happens with a lot of things, it just didn't fly. It got put in front of the wrong people, and those people are the gatekeepers between you and an audience that might love a thing, or hate a thing, but you never really got a chance to find out. It ended up dying at the pilot phase, and we never even really got a pilot. We were supposed to have eleven minutes of animation, which is really what we were working



toward because we just wanted to see this thing come to life. It's just that we came along at one of those times when a studio was transitioning from one regime to the next, and we stopped being cared for and started being this sort of holdover from the previous team of people who were no longer there.

## Turtle Power

Deep into the *Very Important House* struggle, Jhonen took on a gig writing, voice directing, and co-character designing a new *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* short, "Don vs. Raph" in 2016 back at Nickelodeon.

Jhonen: "Don vs. Raph" popped up during *Very Important House*, while it had been dragging on for so long, and we were just so unhappy with the process by that point. It was the prospect of something short,

(Continued on page 194)

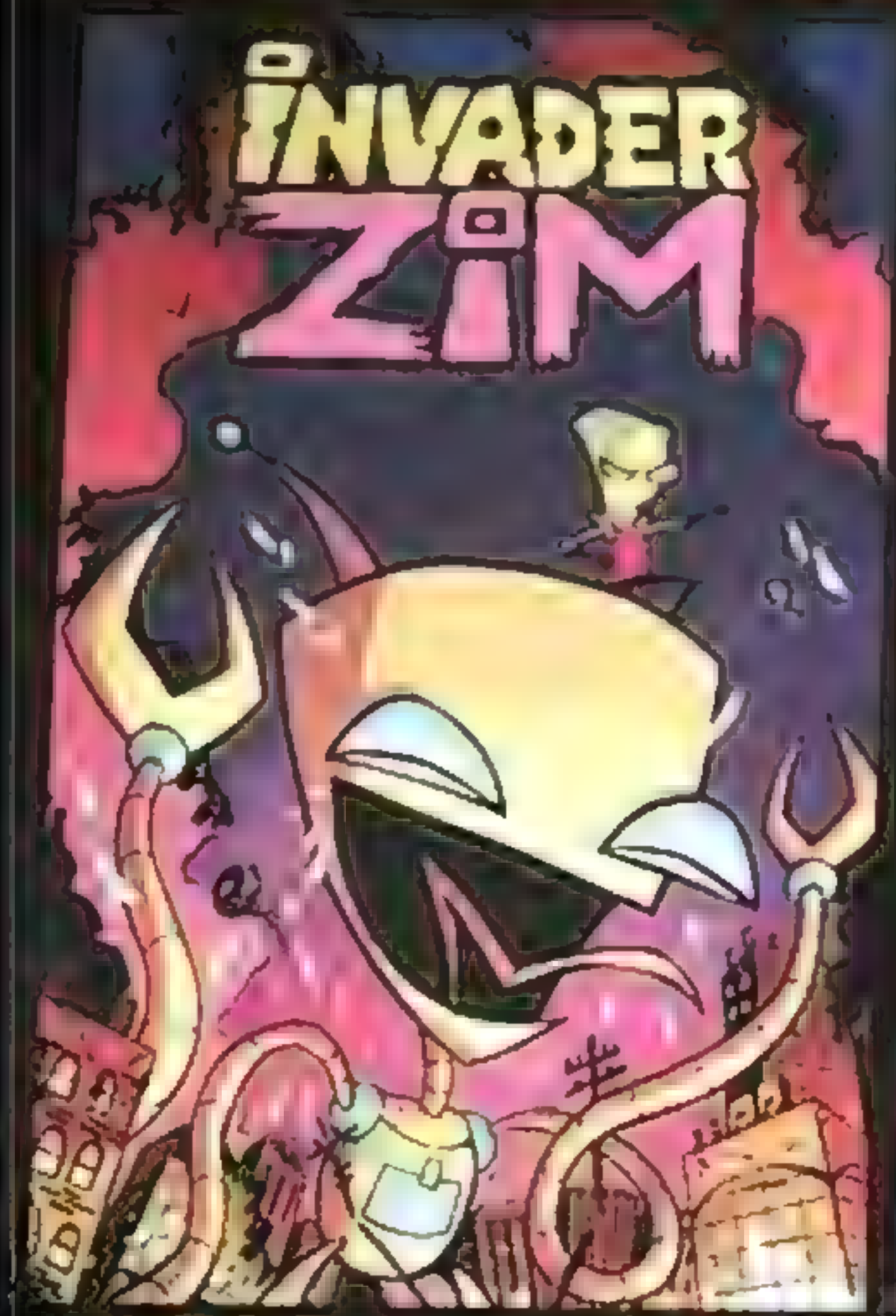
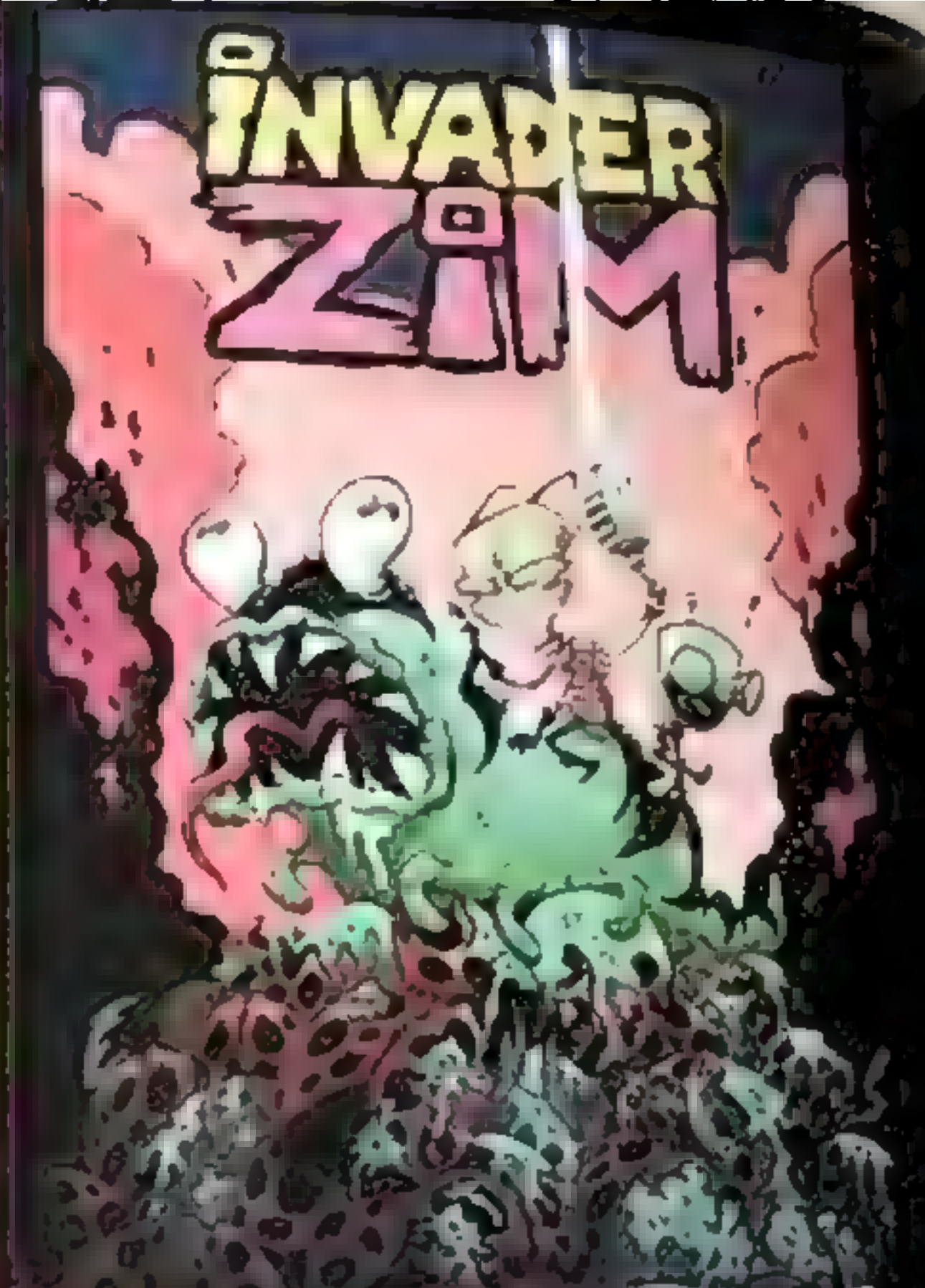
Cover art for *Invader Zim* #2 by Aaron Alex Simons and J.R. Goldberg, #4 by Warren Wuonich with Beau Simons, and #5 by Jhonen with Savannah Gauthreau.

Overleaf: 1. Trade paperback Vol. 2 art by Dave Crossland. 2. Issue #6 cover art by KC Green. 3. Issue #7 cover art by Dave Crossland and

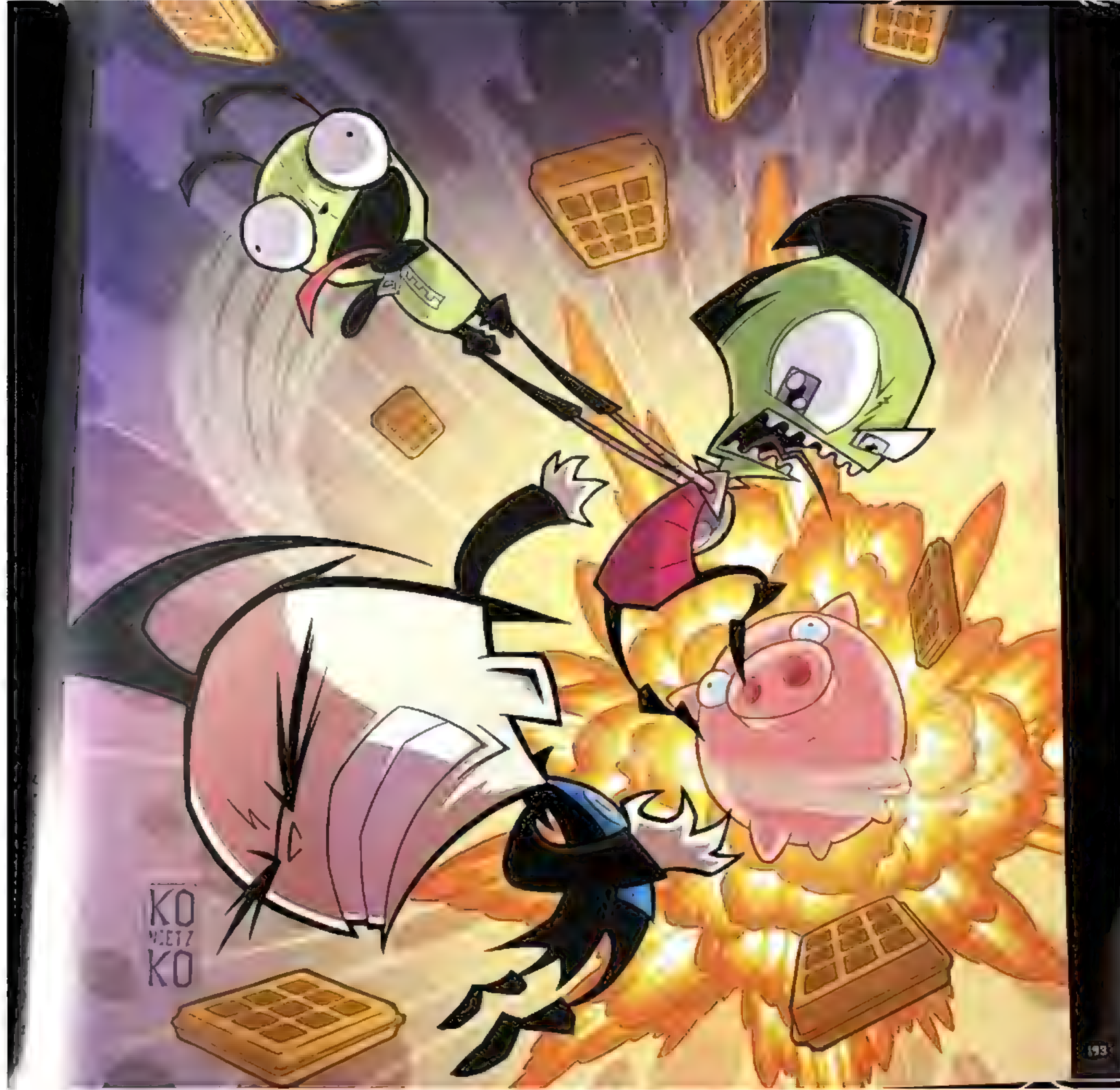
Warren Wuonich. 4. Issue #8 cover art by Dave Crossland with Warren Wuonich. 5. Issue #9 cover art by Dave Crossland with Warren Wuonich.

6. Issue #10 cover art by Dave Crossland with Warren Wuonich. 7. Issue #11 cover art variant by Bryan Konietzko.



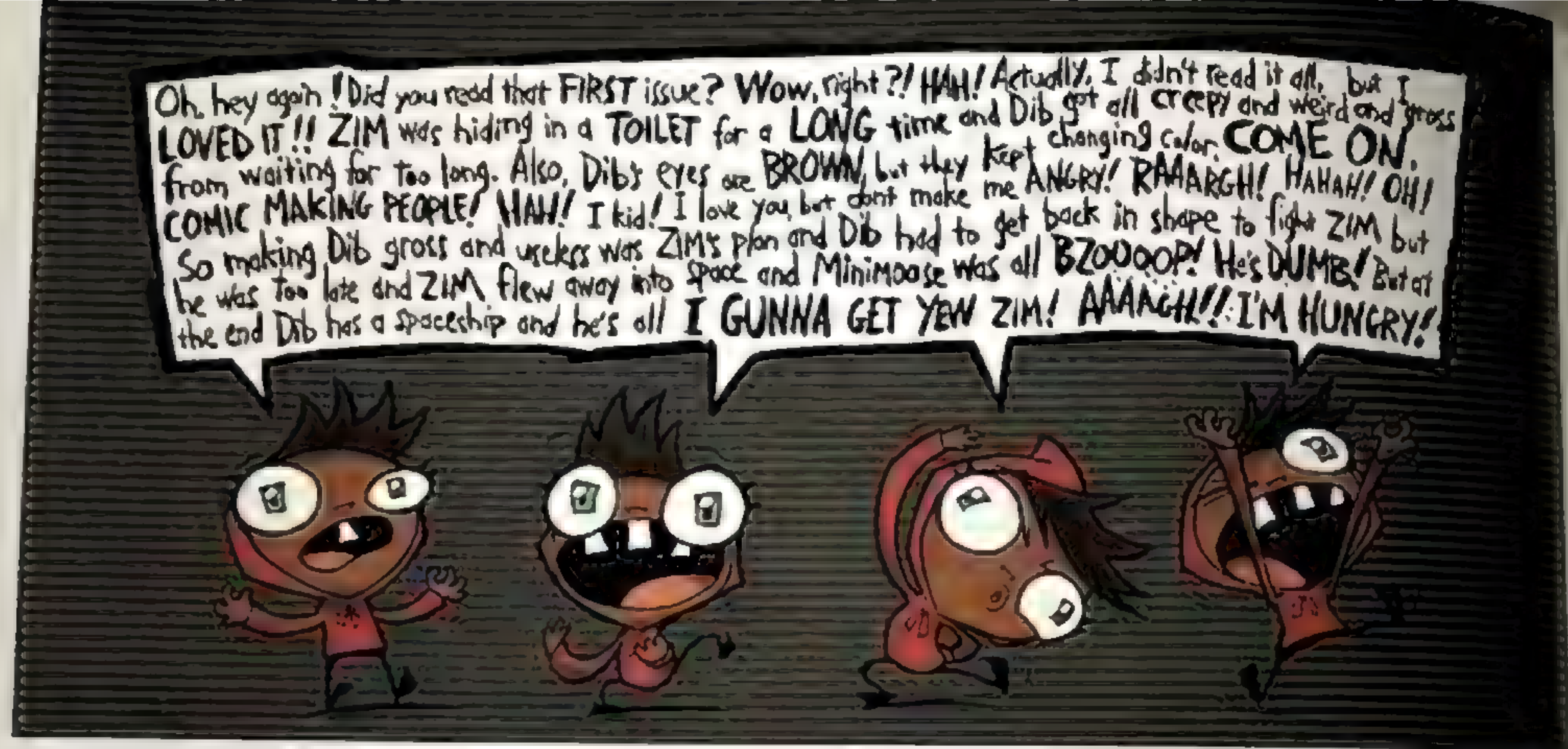






KO  
MEET  
KO





something that was definitely going to get made, and the people from Nickelodeon at the time who contacted me about doing this, these weren't people from my original time at Nickelodeon. These were people who were newer, and who had grown up with the idea of *Zim* as a cool thing and not a curse upon their studio. So it was a completely different attitude that they approached me with. They just wanted me to make anything for them, they were enthusiastic, they were excited, and it was just the nicest feeling when we were otherwise in the middle of a nightmare project, battling to prove that our ideas were worth making. So having someone just come up and say, "Hey. We know what you do. We like what you do. Just make something! Make something with these ninja turtles." It was exactly what I needed at the time and was one

of the more liberating things to have happened to me in years.

So I pitched the idea, wrote the script, and with Titmouse animation I codirected it with a guy named Sung-Jin Ahn. Everyone got it. Everyone was just having a fun time on it. The voice actors had a fun time; everything just worked. Which isn't to say that things being fun and smooth means that you're going to end up with something good, but in this case, it worked out; people liked it. I was proud of what we achieved, and it got a lot of attention. It was a rare thing. I'm not used to things running that smoothly.

### Comics to the Rescue

All along, however, through the project successes and failures, the *Zim* characters never stopped living and

bopping around in Jhonen's head, playing out all sorts of scenarios of paranoia and madness. Oni Press provided a much-needed escape hatch for them in the form of a new ongoing comics series, which launched in 2015 a year before "Din and Raph" and provided a platform beyond Jhonen's own private imaginings, for the *Zim* characters and their narrative to return.

**Jhonen:** We tried to treat the comics just like we were making cartoons.

**Eric Trueheart (writer):** The story content between an eleven minute episode and a comic book is almost exactly the same. Depending on how many panels you devote to Zim screaming, of course. When I rewrote the last episode idea "PANTS" for the comic book, it came out almost identical to how it would have been on screen.

Above: Recap Kid gets excited about comics





Jhonen: We got to play a little bit with the format of being a comic book. We added a character who was more self-aware. Even though they don't really do a lot of crossover with the content, we came up with a character whose existence is to just recap previous issues, and they became a character called Recap Kid. Which is something we never did with the show. We didn't have the series be self-aware. In the end, at least in the front matter, we play with that. Sometimes themselves the characters still don't realize that they're in a comic book.

Recap Kid quickly became a fan favorite. The kid has no name and is gender-nonspecific, allowing us to easily personify comics enthusiasm for every reader. Recap Kid's excitement is contagious, as is his habit of run-on sentences detailing the last issue while dropping hints about the one about to begin.

For the initial five issues, Aaron Alexovich was the main artist with Megan Lawton on inks, which set the tone. It was a natural fit for Aaron, who, besides Zim, has mostly worked in comics on his own series *Screen Room*, *Unusual Whispers*, and more.

**Aaron Alexovich (character designer):** I would take a script from Jhonen or Eric Trueheart, and then do layouts, thumbnails.

The comics series also served as a laboratory for character-design evolution.

**Aaron:** I don't think it was intended to be that, but of course it was that, since this was the first time Jhonen was taking a look at the characters after the series ended. It was an opportunity to update and freshen them up a little bit. So we definitely seized that opportunity.



Gaz changed quite a bit. Honestly, on the show, I don't think we ever quite 100 percent figured out her design. It wasn't until the toys came out that I really even understood her hair. It's a really strange shape to work with. We streamlined her—her hair is more rounded off, and we gave her a different outfit. She looks more like some tough gamer now. She has this shirt with a digital-looking bunny skull and these big clomping boots.

Dib got an upgrade as well. He's got a little ghost on his shirt now. Dib has hair on the sides of his head now, too [instead of closely shaved to the skin]. Which is interesting because it seems like current popular style has recently gone the other direction. [laughs]

Jhonen enlisted the help of Jenny Goldberg to do touch-up corrections on comics artwork, color pages, and essentially fill the role of an art director for the first

(Continued on page 188)

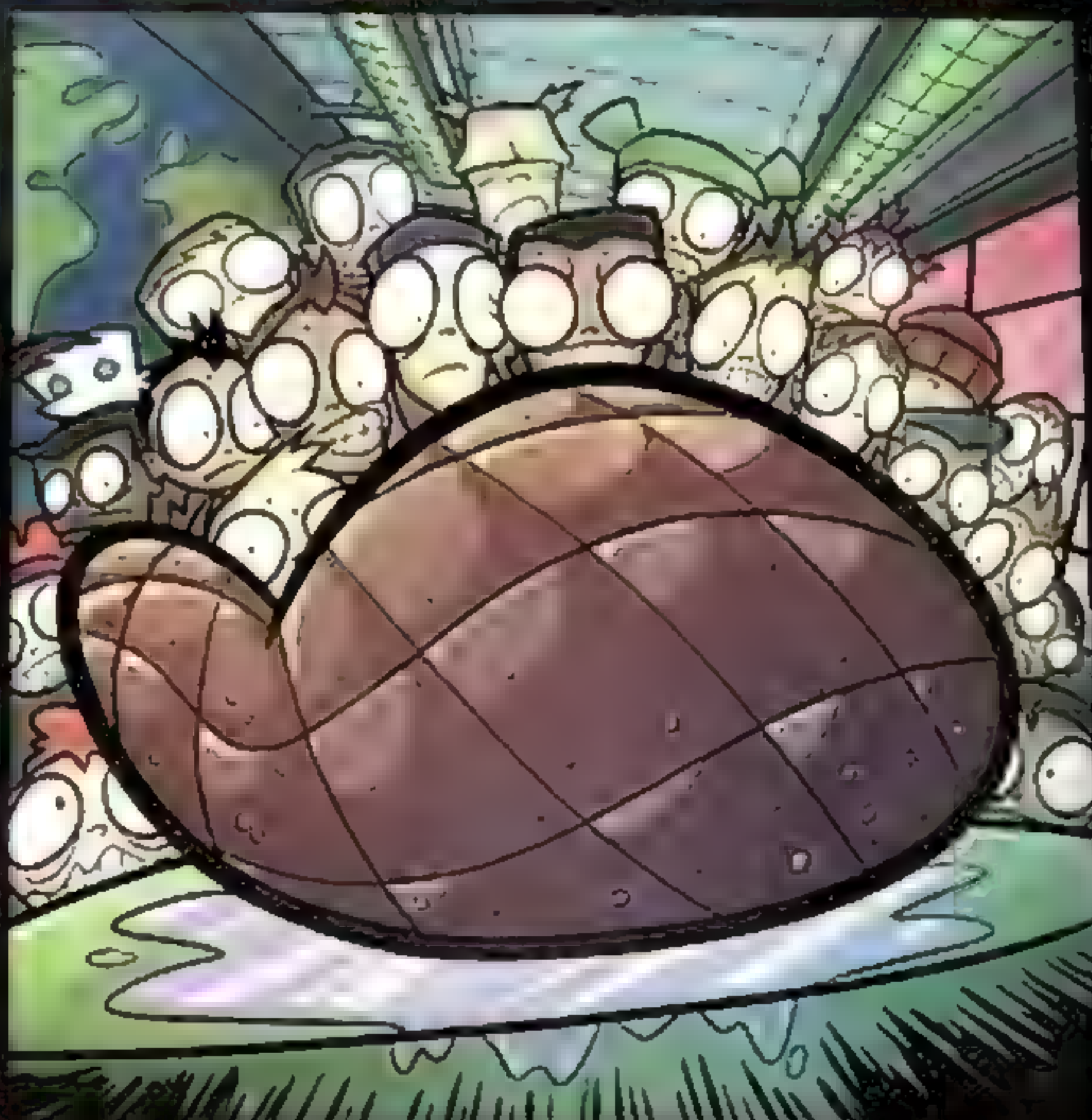
Comic panels from *Invasion Zim* were drawn by Aaron Alexovich, inks by Megan Lawton, and colors by Simon "Hut" Trousdale.

**Overleaf:** Various *Invasion Zim* comics interior art details by 1. KC Green with Savannah Garuchau 2. Dave Croeland with Warren Wucnich 3. Sarah

Anderson with Katy Farna 4. Warren Wucnich with Fred C. Streising 5. Dave Croeland with Fred C. Streising 6. Megan Lawton 7. Aaron Alexovich

with Cassie Kelly 8. Dave Croeland with Warren Wucnich

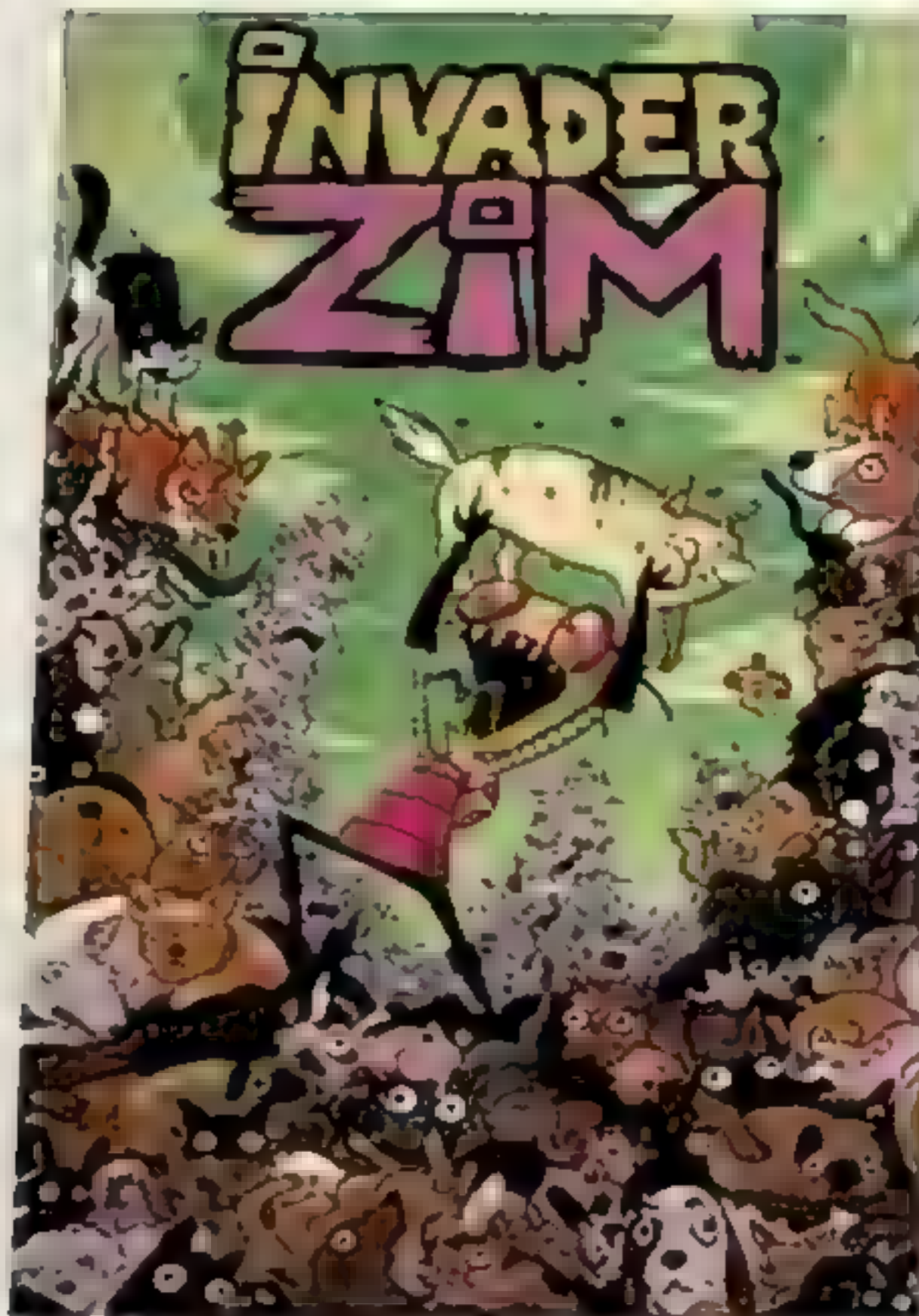












six issues (and then issue #9, too, as well as a cover for the series).

**Jenny Goldberg [art director]:** I started art directing the comics because the colors that were coming back were looking not quite like what Jhonen wanted. So Jhonen and I had long discussions about what an updated version of Zim would be. We referenced a lot of French comics artwork. I also discussed with him what the show made me feel, visually, versus what it actually was, when I was growing up with it.

I noticed that when a lot of people talk about the colors for Zim, as they remember them, they were kind of bright and saturated and psychotic-looking—people remember the show being insane-looking. But I rewatched all the episodes for myself to work on the colors for the comics and the movie, and



the actual color scheme is super desaturated. It's a purple-black, a dirty red, olive green, and ham-pink. It's the weirdest palette, and it's genuinely kind of gross. It finds its legs more in season two, but in the first season it was like, "Oh my God, this is not what I recall from my memories of this show!" Everybody else that I talked to had the same reaction. So what I was trying to do is pull more from what the show gave me, and what the show made me feel in order to update the color scheme for it, as opposed to plucking colors directly from the old series.

The comics series offered a wide-open sandbox for talented artists and writers to play in. As the series progressed, the editorial team at Oni engaged a variety of independent creators such as KC Green, Maddie C., Dave Crosland, and more to play with Zim, Dib, and associates. The series followed the example of some—



but not all—other licensed cartoon comic book series in which the artwork is rendered in each of the artist's personal styles as opposed to requiring rigid uniform work. The artists responded by creating a wild variety of scenarios in the main and secondary stories, featuring mind-swapping, a rare Poop Cola, a fake zox, Mr. Weiner Face, mutant animals, a private space program, and much more.

**Jhonen:** I was heavily involved in the first five issues and I wrote a few after that, also doing the occasional cover art. After that it was mainly that I would chime in on what the stories were going to be and pitch in a little bit when Zim seemed too off-character. It is fun seeing the issues where I've been the most removed, so that I actually got to enjoy Zim stories the way that the fans do. It's fun for me to sit down and read an issue and not know what's going to

This spread: *Invader Zim* #11 cover art by Sarah Anderson, #13 cover art by Warren Wucnich, #14 cover art by Warren Wucnich,

#15 cover art by Warren Wucnich, and the *Invader Zim* Vol. 4 Oni Exclusive trade paperback cover art by Paul Robertson

Overleaf: 1. *Invader Zim* Vol. 2 Oni Exclusive trade paperback cover art by Jhonen Vasquez. 2. Vol. 2 trade paperback cover art by Dave

Crosland with Warren Wucnich. 3. #5 variant cover art by Jhonen Vasquez. 4. Vol. 1 trade paperback art by Aaron Abozovich with Simon

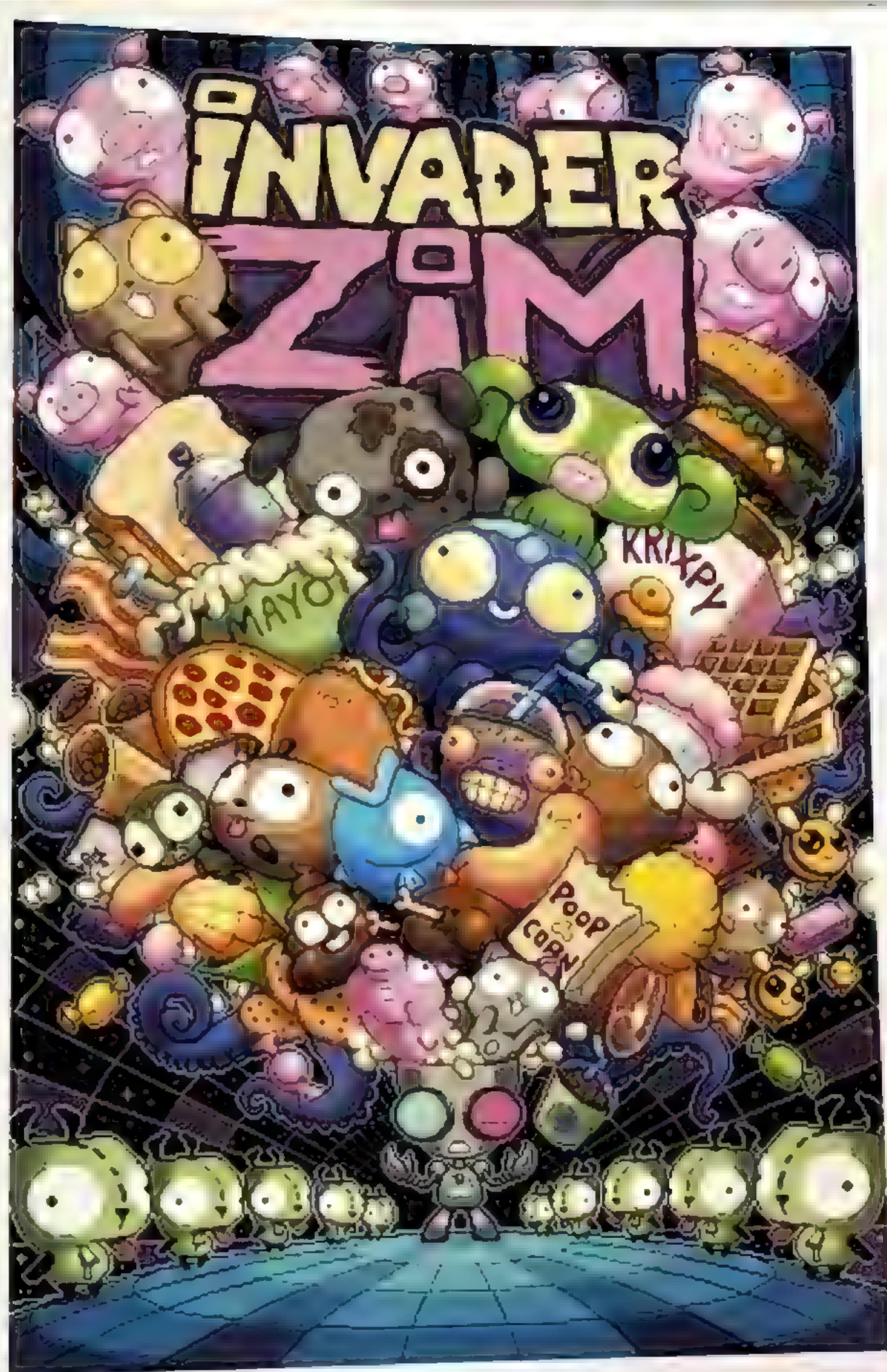




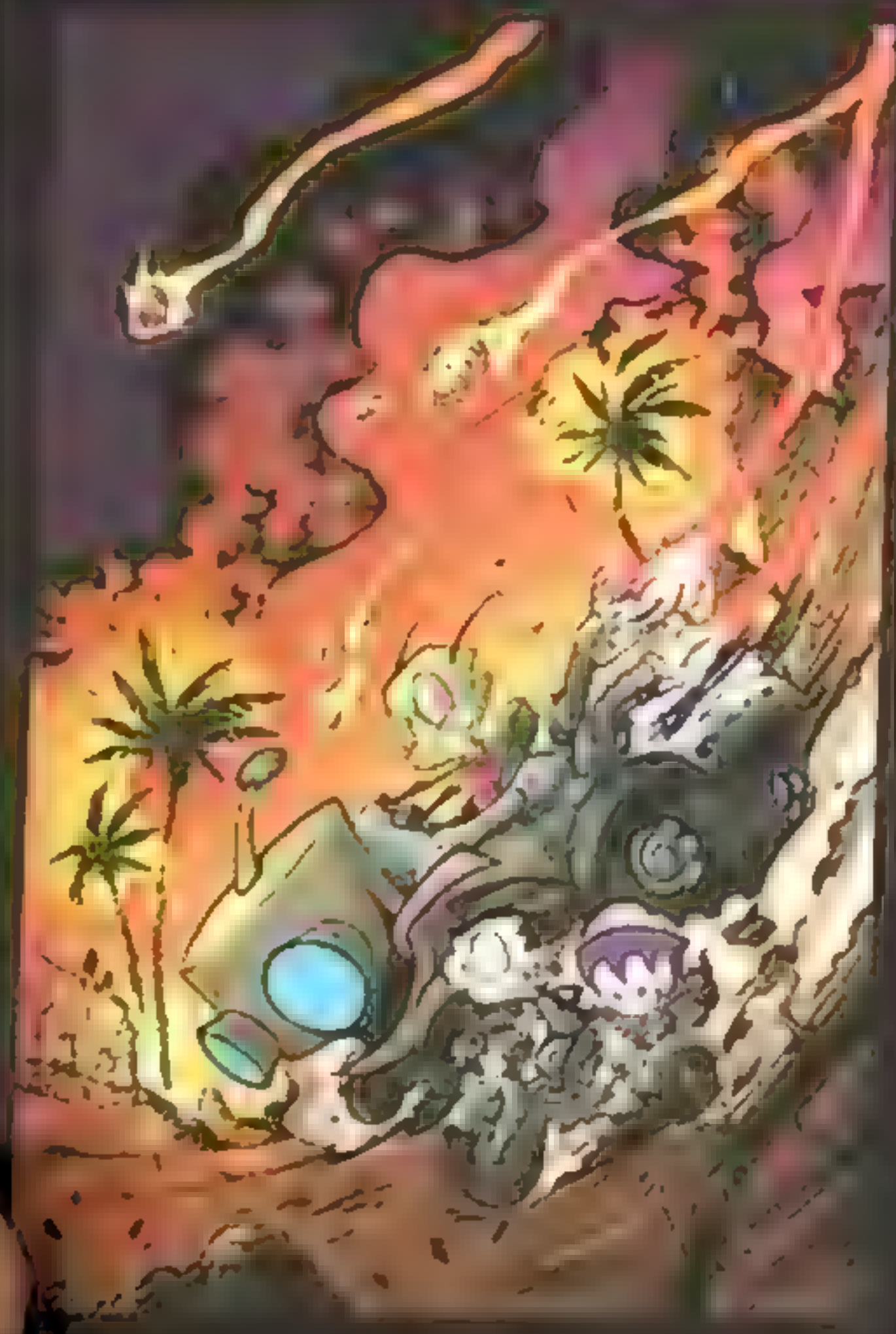
"I don't know this artist, so this is weird to me, but it's exciting. It's cool to see your character in things outside of your control. Sometimes it's like, 'Enough! I would not have ever done that! This is not me!' Other times I'm laughing because it's not something that I would have ever done, but it's funny."

The book provided a soft relaunch back into the world of Zim for Jhonen and key collaborators. Zim was excited and ready for his glorious, pulsating, and... but Jhonen soon found himself once again in the studio, plotting out the nefarious plans of *Invader Zim*. Thankfully, Earth's mightiest hero had been resurrected.

Invader Zim #4 trade paperback cover art by  
Invader Zim #1 comic art variant  
by Jhonen with J.R. Goldberg







# INVADER ZIM



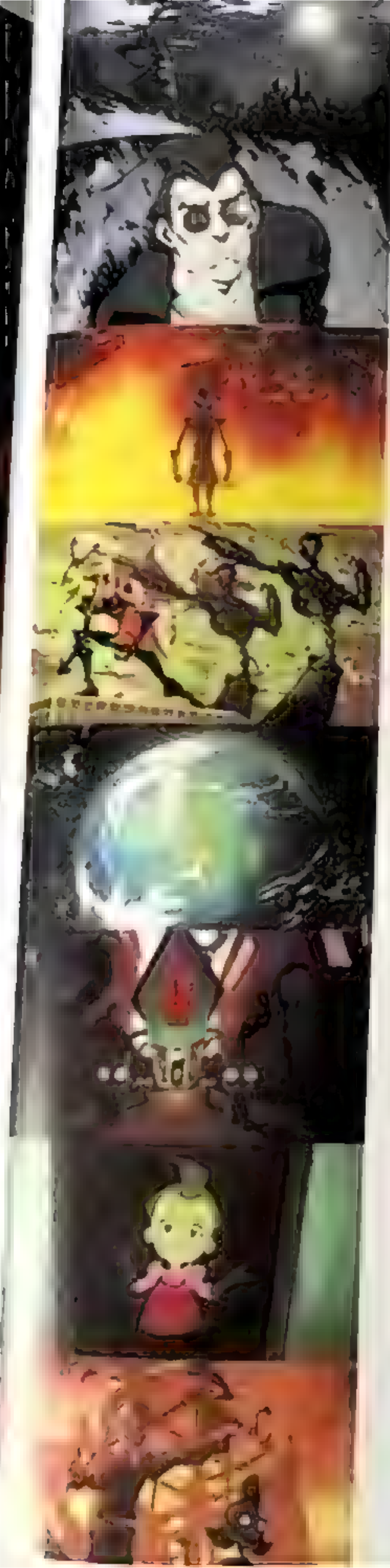












## 5: THE CINEMATIC ZIM

### WAITING AND DESIGNING THE ZIM MOVIE

Suddenly, Zim has returned to invade homes one stream at a time on Netflix in a brand-new feature-length movie: *Invader Zim: Enter the Florpus*!

For Zim's return to the small screen, almost everything has changed. Televisions are now high-definition widescreens. The format is now feature-length. The crew is mostly new and young enough to have grown up with *Zim* themselves. Original fans of the series are now young adults primed for nostalgia, but they are now also armed with limber and wriggling typing fingers, ready to pounce with one-star vengeance on any production that does not meet their expectations. And don't forget the children! The actual, primary audience of cartoon productions rated TV-Y7-FV [designed for children age seven and above; includes fantasy violence] is a mass of youth who are potentially new to *Zim* in the first place. How will their spongy brains absorb the madness?

The overall time frame for production on the movie,



which began in earnest in 2016, provided ample time to reimagine and revise every element of *Zim* from the ground up, but the movie was going to have to be produced and launched with care.

Fortunately, the creative partnership of two of the primary figures behind this movie had been building cohesion and trust for years: longtime friends Jhonen and Jenny

**Jenny Goldberg [art director]:** The first thing Jhonen and I ever collaborated on was back when I was in college. We did this horrifically stupid little book called *Jellyfish*, which came out and disappeared immediately (which I was kind of thankful for). It was awful. Jhonen wrote these micro-scripts, and then I would just draw comics based on these scripts with no guidance, and then he would tell me how much he hated them, and then we would write in the margins of the comic a back-and-forth

Opposite: Background art from *Enter the Florpus*.

This page: Stills from the opening sequence of *Enter the Florpus* in which Dib's monologue is accompanied by dramatically stylish visuals.





between the two of us, with him telling me how much I strayed from the original idea. He and I have been friends since I was eighteen, and we've constantly been drawing together. There was probably about five or six years of us trying to get *Very Important House* off the ground. There was the *Zim* comics and now this movie, so we have a long history of working together.

I've been fortunate to have known Jhonen as well as I do and have him as my best friend, and also get to make cool stuff with him, whether it fails or not! The way that we joke around and interact together gets deeply integrated into anything that we work on—it's impossible to separate those two things. Every fart joke and dumb mouth sound effect. It's in there. It's like we're family. My mom calls him the son she'd never had. Because we love what we do and adore each other, it's a great combo for making stuff.

There were all new challenges to take. Jhonen and crew couldn't just pick up where they last left off and do the same thing as before. The very idea of making a single feature-length story versus a series of shorts is vastly different. Writing isn't an automated process in which X time spent equals Y words produced, and what works for eleven minutes does not work for sixty-six. The movie script could not simply be a stack of six eleven-minute *Zim* episodes.

**Jhonen Vasquez (series creator):** This special was the most ironed-out, heavily outlined thing we've done. We spent an entire year outlining and writing the script. And like the series, it kept changing up until even the very last second. It was the most planning I have ever done, which was interesting but also kind of miserable. I can't stand not having a nice cushion of free-forming. I know

everything that was going to happen in this script too far ahead of time. I prefer to have a little bit of freedom to just play around.

When he heard that *Zim* was to be revived at Nickelodeon, Brechn Burns, a fan of the original series, leapt at the chance to join in the fray. He had, after all, made a promise to himself that he would work on *Zim* one day after seeing a VHS tape of the pilot at Nickelodeon's offices in New York, back in 2001. After his dreams were immediately crushed by *Zim*'s cancellation, he somehow found the strength to soldier on. In 2016, older and wiser, and with significant writer/director experience under his belt on other shows like *Bravest Warriors*, Brechn began the long journey of *Zim* movie development with Jhonen in endless coffee-shop writing sessions.





**Breehn Burns (supervising producer):** The question was, "Can *Invader Zim* sustain a 10-minute format?" Followed closely by, "How much screaming is too much screaming?" and "Is screaming too much for people, because eleven minutes was just about perfect?" [laughs] I can't say that we arrived at some perfect alchemy. We kept our attention to themes, arriving at a theme of brotherhood and seeking out father figures. For the time, even if it's just for a second, you get a little bit of the bond between Zim and Dib, because they're on the same journey of feeling rejected by their fathers. Finding threads that could sustain a series that was important. We needed to find a character journey for the two main characters. A character journey for inflexibly rigid characters can be more challenging.

**Jhonen:** Zim is completely unchanged in terms of what he was—there's just not a lot to him. You can't do a whole lot to Zim. He's incredibly single-minded, not the deepest character at all. That's kind of the whole point of him: He's absolutely oblivious to any of his own flaws. He's the best, and everyone else is inferior, and he just screams a lot. But for the special, there had to be some ups and downs.

**Breehn:** Jhonen designed the characters for comedic purposes. They're so stupid and so self-important, and so determined to succeed and totally un-self-aware. We had meetings where we would just sit in cafés and restaurants over the months writing the outline and the script, and one of the things that I was encouraging Jhonen to find were new places for the characters to go. And it's hard to do that because they're not designed to go new places.

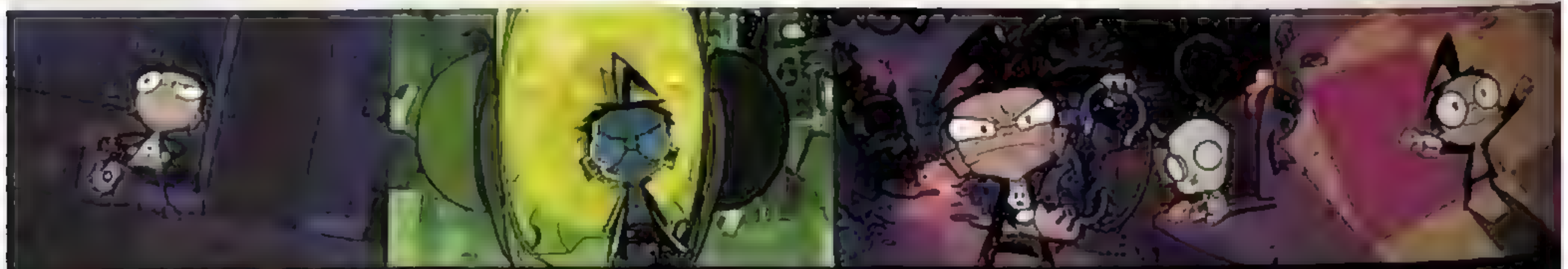
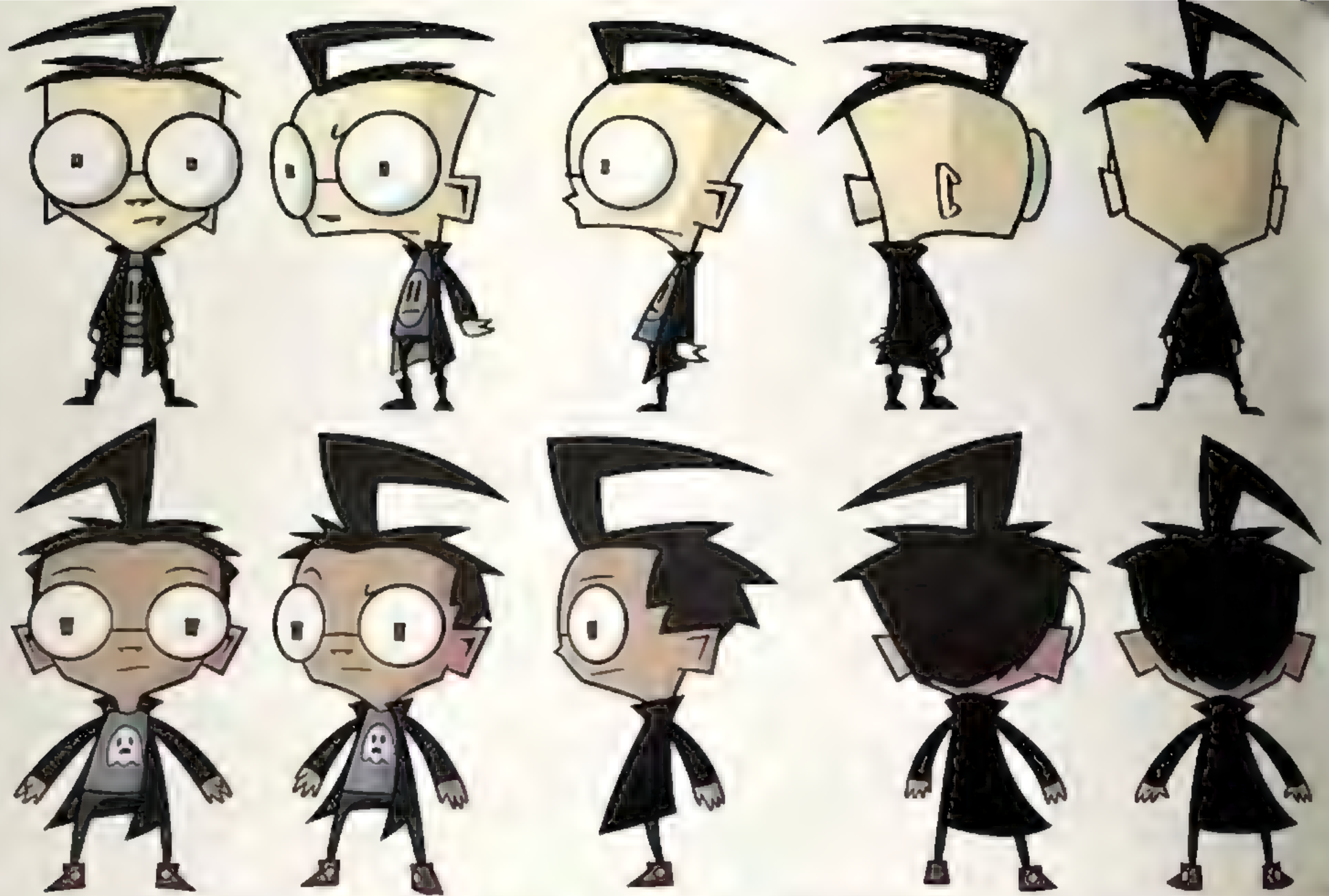
**Jhonen:** Zim has his own form of emotional low, but Dib probably got the most in terms of having an actual character arc. I'm hesitant to actually say "character development," because Zim, the show, has never been about developing [laughs] or progressing, they're just trapped in this perpetual anger and frustration. For the special, I think we dealt with it in a way that feels like the show. It doesn't feel like a huge departure.

**Breehn:** Part of what Jhonen wanted me to do was to help him find a slightly more emotionally connected family dynamic for the characters. We tried not to go overboard with it, but we gave Gaz an arc where she finally has to be like, "I love my brother," [laughs] which is something that she would never say out loud. Early on Zim hits his low point, but then we go to Dib's low point when he realizes that everything

(Continued on page 219)

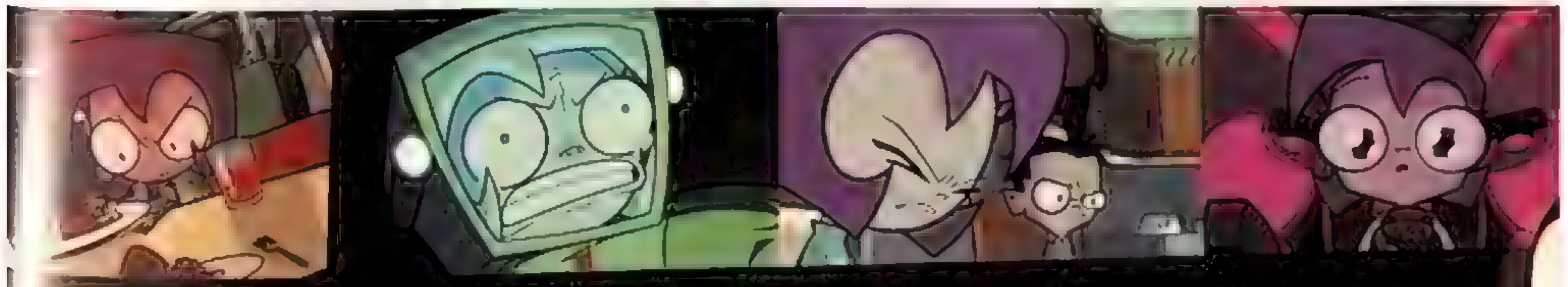
This spread: Four backgrounds show Zim's house in various lighting conditions and weather, suggesting the power of color design to change mood.





 CHARACTER DESIGN

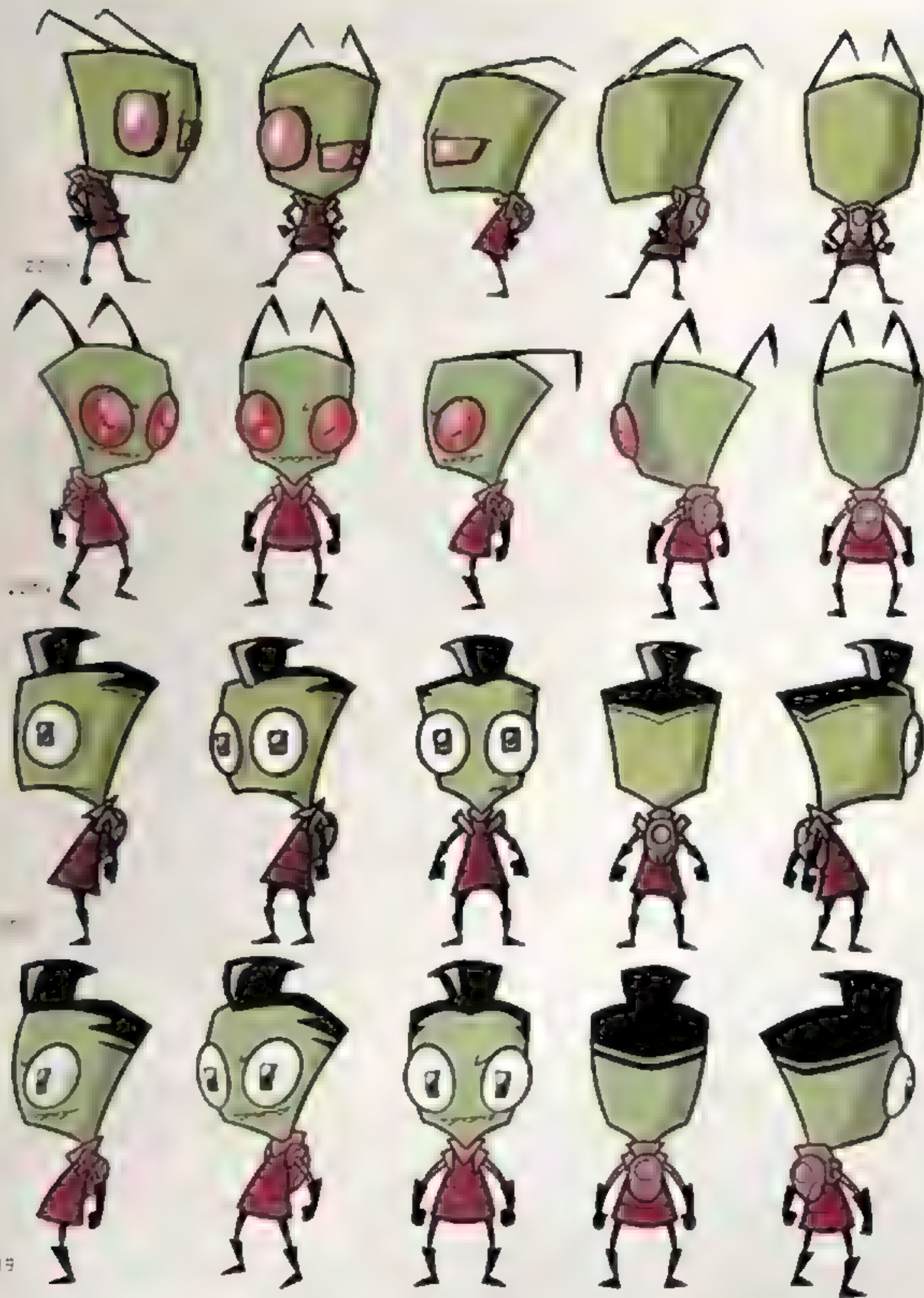




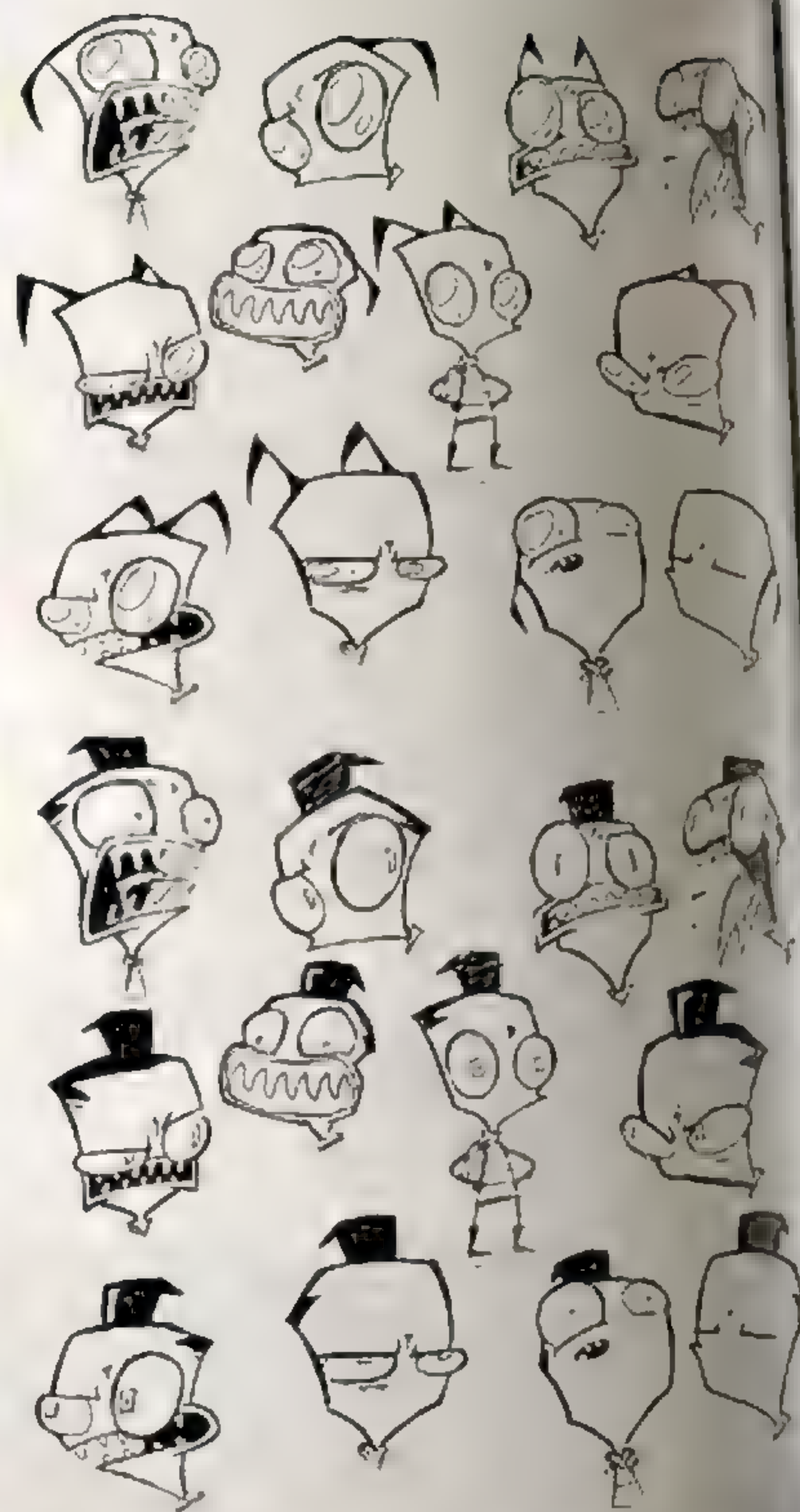
This spread: Character turnarounds of Dib and Gaz showing off their revised 2019 Flapjack-on designs beneath their original 2000 series-on

designs for comparison, along with some stills from Flapjack. Also above are some Gaz expressions by Shonen for the movie.





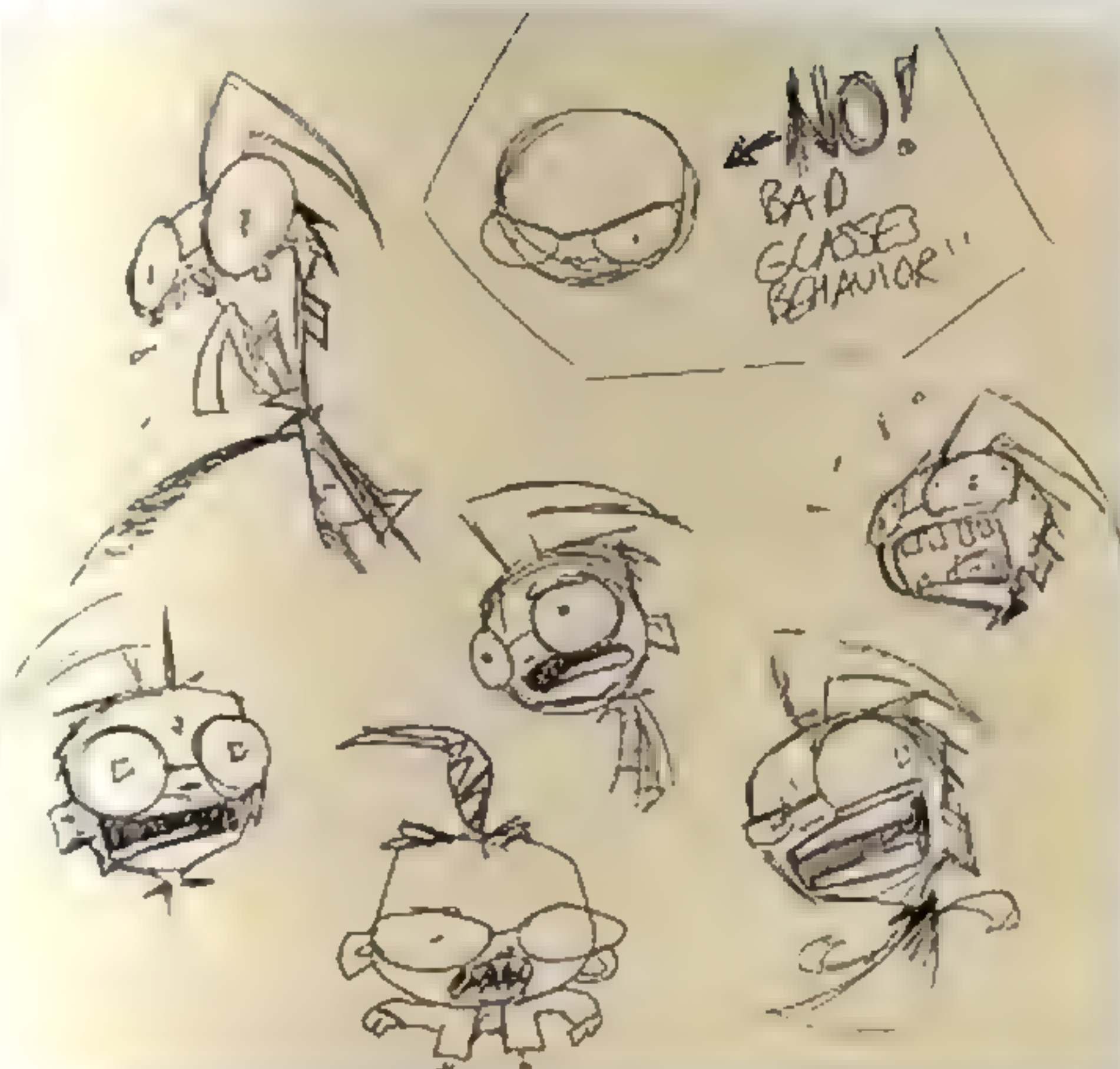
2019



CHARACTER DESIGN

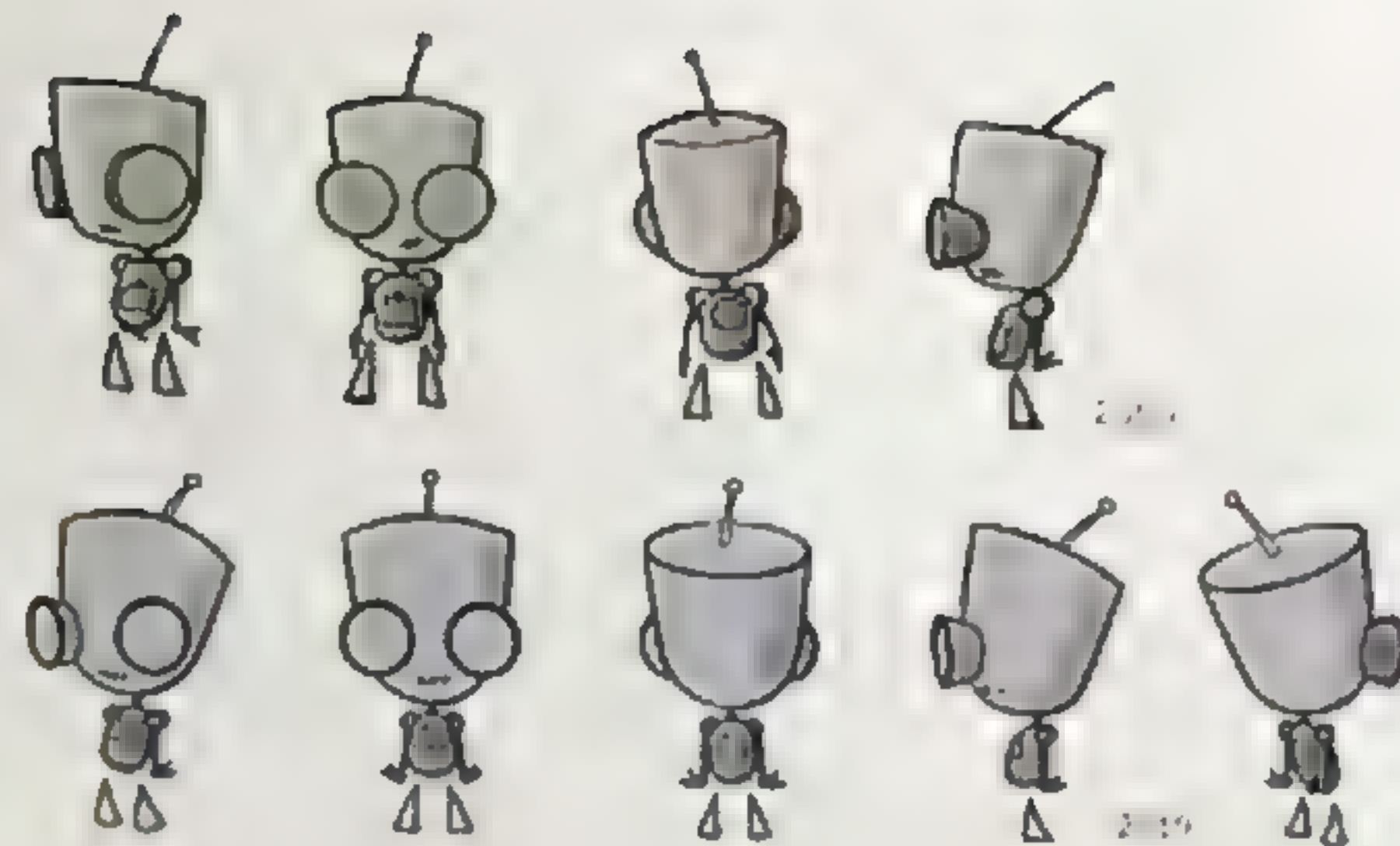
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146 likes

innervue The overseas animators asked for me to do drawings of the main characters showing different expressions as examples of how I personally draw them, so I started with this guy. Because ZIM's emotional spectrum is so narrow, he's always been easier to pull off for people so, even if he's being drawn somewhat off, he's still funny. Dib's always been trickier as he has somewhat more territory as a character to cover: he can be as wild as ZIM, but there's more self awareness in him so where ZIM is just clueless and angry, Dib can come off as just off-putting and abrasive. His expressions are a huge part of bringing him back towards being funny but also, hopefully more sympathetic while not going too hard into insincere seeming vulnerability. Dib's a jerk for sure, but he's still a kid, and I've always been very sensitive to drawings that don't contain both aspects in the right proportions.



2000

2001

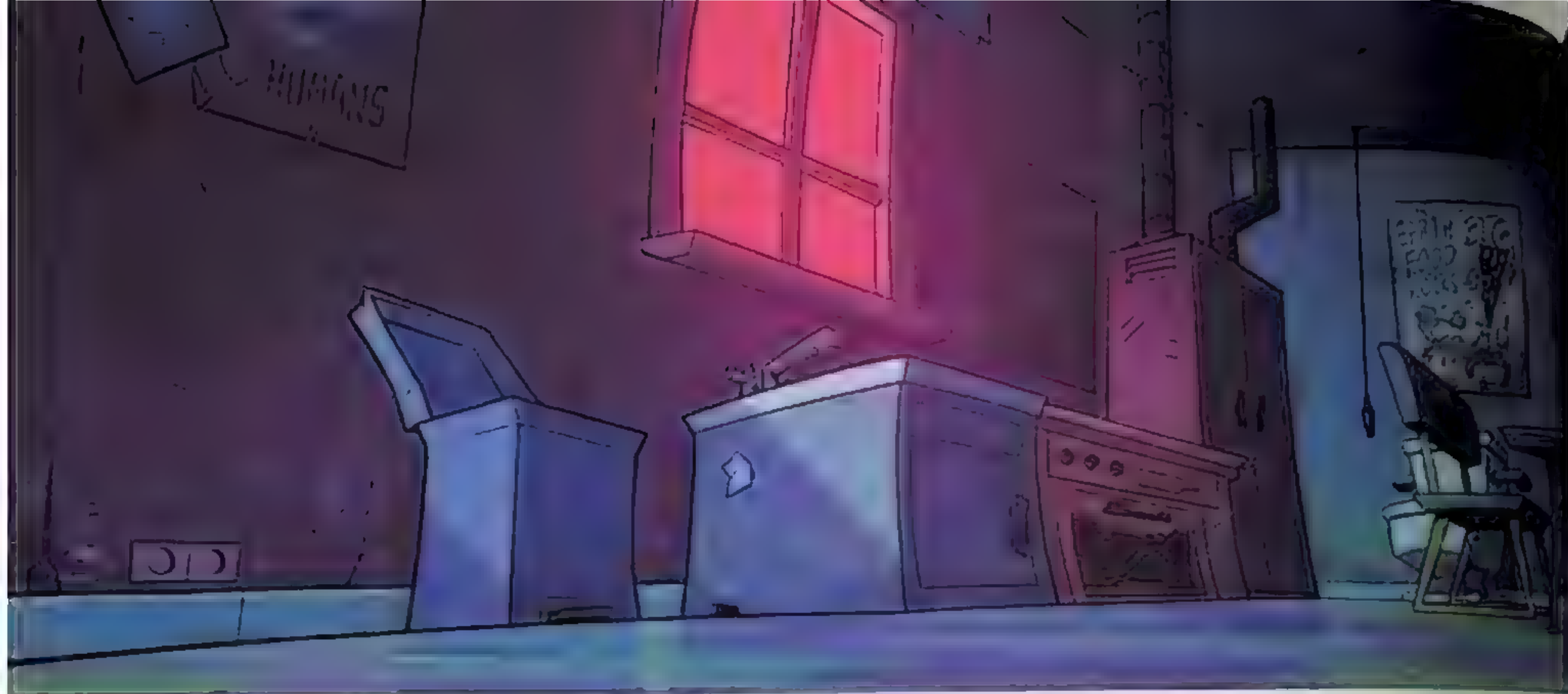
2019

**This spread:** Character turnarounds of Zim and Gir showing off their revised 2019 Flopue-era designs beneath their original 2000 series-era designs for comparison.

**Above:** A social media post Jhonon created while visiting the Korean animation studio, with rough Dib sketches and insight into his efforts to

find the right blend of expression in the designs. Also above, a comparison of the Talbot's evolutionary stages from 2000, 2001, and 2018.





that has happened is essentially his fault. His sister has to kind of actually back him up, and pick him up off his feet and say, "We're going to get through this." Which, you know, for Gaz, that's a Hallmark Moment. It's unheard of for her. I think she's one of everybody's favorite characters, and it's cool to see her stretch a little bit.

From the opening scenes of the movie, the audience is trusted to jump on board quickly. There isn't time to be wasted on excessive backstory.

**Jhonen:** It's important to not take too much too time to introduce new viewers to the characters in a way where it's like, reestablishing the story, the origins and all that. One of my favorite things growing up was coming home and putting on *Inspector Gadget*. I didn't know what *Inspector Gadget* was. I'd never seen it,

I'd never heard of it. I just turned on the TV, and it had been running for a while, but it didn't matter. I just knew that this character was an idiot, and he had these side-kicks that were smarter than him. And his enemy was some weird dude. It didn't matter that I had no clue what the history of this was. I just instantly liked it. So the special takes the attitude of, "We're not going to tell you who these characters are." There's a little bit of catch-up, there's a few seconds of "Zim's an alien, he's on Urth..." but I didn't want to waste time.

I figure that their personalities are strong enough that you know that this one's the idiot, and that one's the other idiot. And this one's the other other idiot. And they're both kind of the bad guy, and they're both kind of the good guy. The special doesn't work too hard to get you up to speed. It starts off entertaining and hopefully continues being entertaining whether or not you know the history.

Zim, Gaz, and Dib's designs had evolved in the comics, and were codified with new model sheets for the movie. Professor Membrane was reimagined as well.

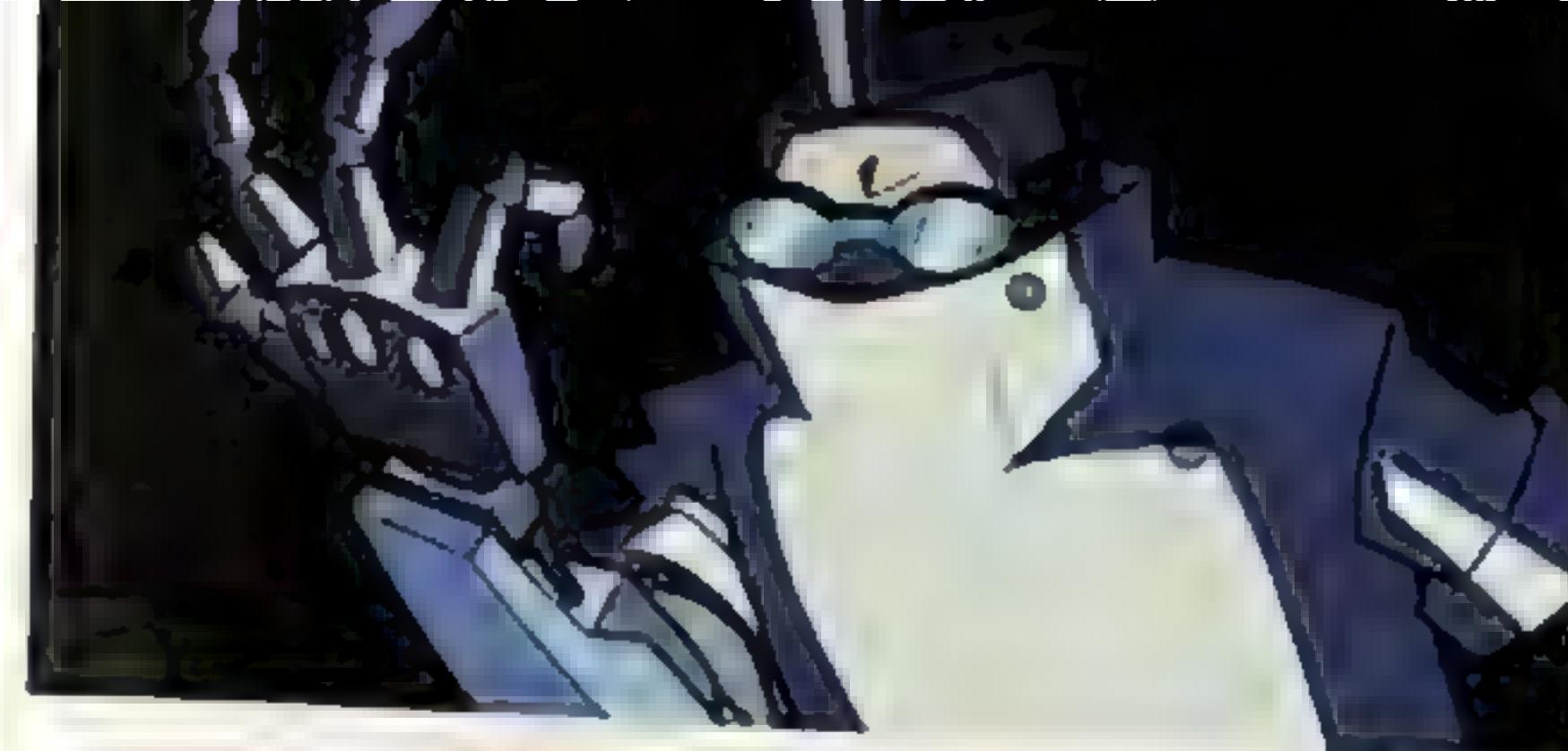
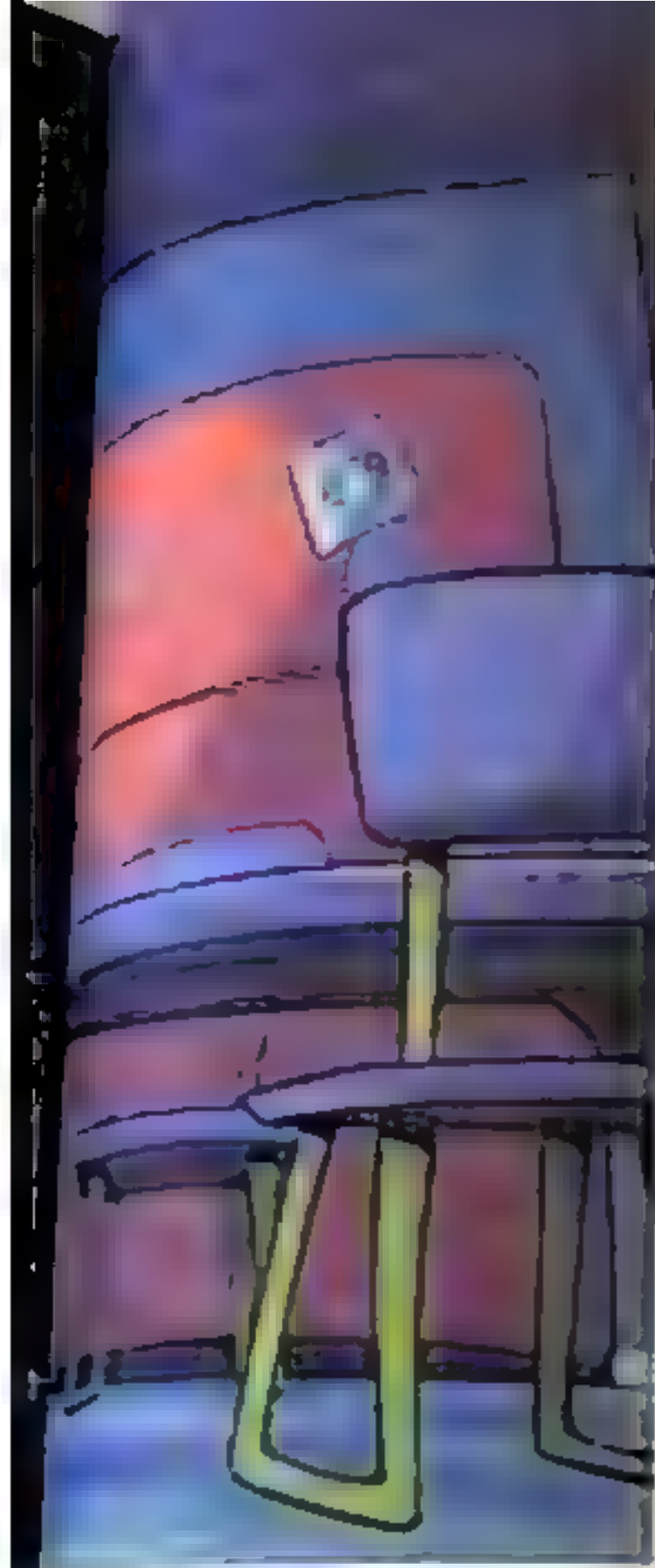
**Jhonen:** I came close to putting a moment in where something blows Membrane's coat back, and you see his legs, and they go up really high up—like his torso is incredibly short, but we didn't do it! I know [laughs] You think he's this big strapping superman, but he's really all legs.

He's pretty redesigned. I think he looks more like what I wanted him to be in the first place. For some reason in the series he ended up getting sort of streamlined. He was kind of like a string bean man. He never really exuded power. In this movie, he looks like a superhero. He's the world's most famous scientist and TV star, and I wanted him to look impossible. He's like everything Dib isn't. Dib isn't

Above: Under art director Jenny Goldberg's guidance, Florpus background art has an advanced sense of atmospheric space, partly due to the

carefully painted graduated light diffusing through the interiors.





...not strapping, he's not powerful-looking—  
and is just this god. So Membrane's designed  
... He's wider, and he's more powerfully  
... the ground. He's a huge part of the special

...enes and background design evolved as  
...ension of the work already completed on

...en: The new stuff, there's more atmosphere  
...g. Which is weird in a sense. Because  
...think of *Zim*, the target look for *Zim* was  
...very simple. Like *The Simpsons*. Or *Futura*—  
...flat-shaded [flat colors enclosed with line-  
...a classic cartoon frame painted on cellu-  
...not a lot of gradients, not a lot of atmosphere;  
...comic-stark. But the movie looks almost  
...cept art

By the time we got to working on the special  
we had a pretty good idea of how we were going  
to approach it. It was still with the idea of keeping  
the world as this hyper, vivid, toxic place. Radioac-  
live greens, burning reds and fuchsias, the effect  
of flashing a light through a gel in a dark room...  
burning through the screen in these hotspots. The  
classic example would be Zim's windows—those hot  
red, beacons. Blood-red skies.

We had to do a thing in the special where we  
couldn't have blood-red skies for most of the movie  
because the third act is the apocalyptic part, so we  
needed contrast with that beforehand. So we had to  
settle on using a normal blue sky. That was hard to  
adapt to.

Normalcy? In a *Zim* cartoon? Another symptom of  
the feature length considerations: having to set up a

sense of calm and stability in order to contrast with and  
destroy that while building to the climax

**Jhonen:** The special is less preoccupied with how  
filthy the world is. The story just wasn't focused  
on that. After two or three years of working on this  
one story, it gets frustrating because you can't  
help but want to tell another story. Now I want to  
do everything that this story doesn't do. Now I  
want to do horror! And gross stuff!

The series was full of a bunch of people who  
were huge horror and science fiction people. The  
movie special? Not so much, in terms of the horror  
element especially. That element on the new crew  
was greatly diminished. I would make references  
to the crew and discover, "You've never seen  
*Gremlins*?" or even, "You've never seen... a  
horror movie?"

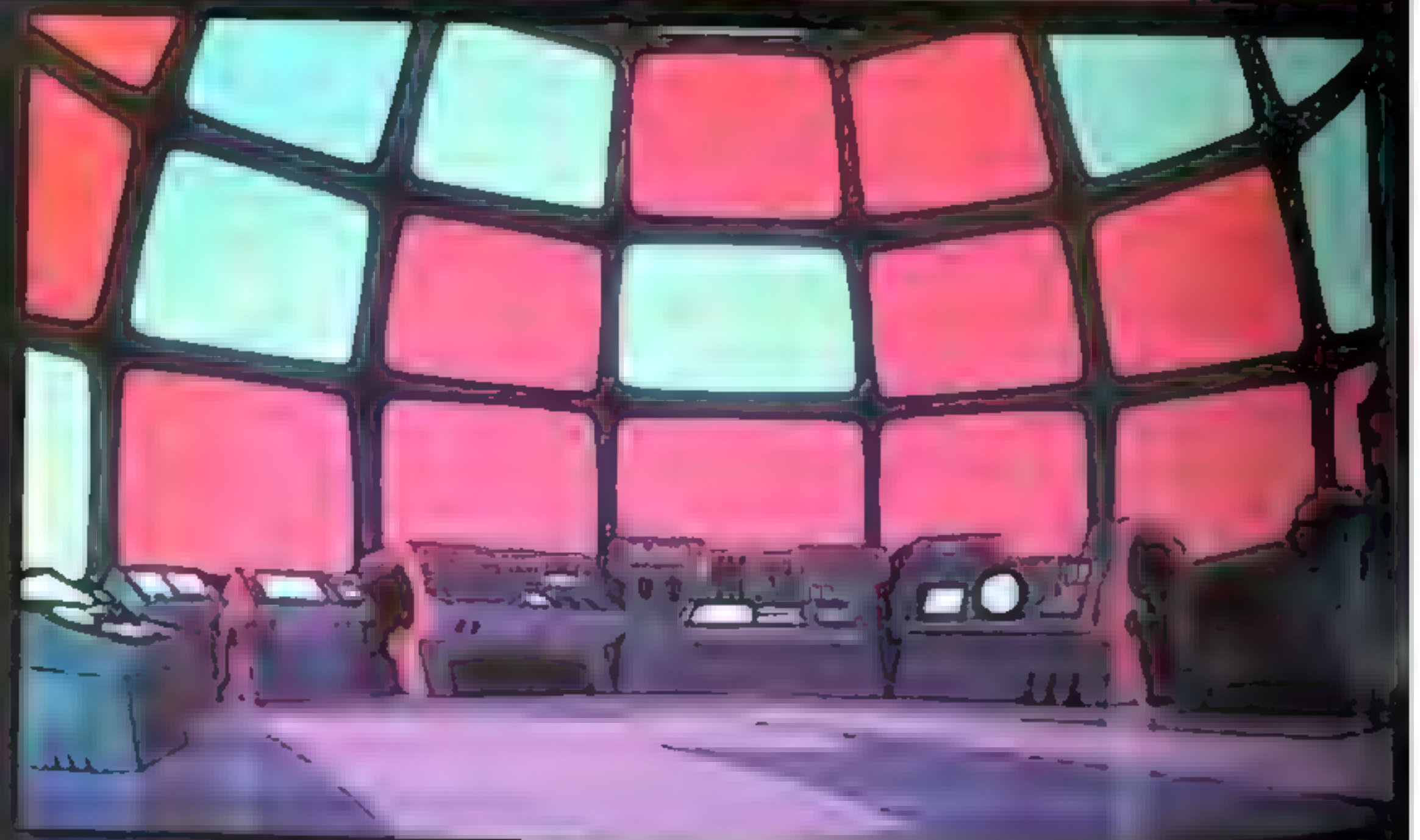
(Continued on page 214)

**Above:** Still from *Florpus* featuring the newly  
designed powerful proportions of Professor  
Membrane

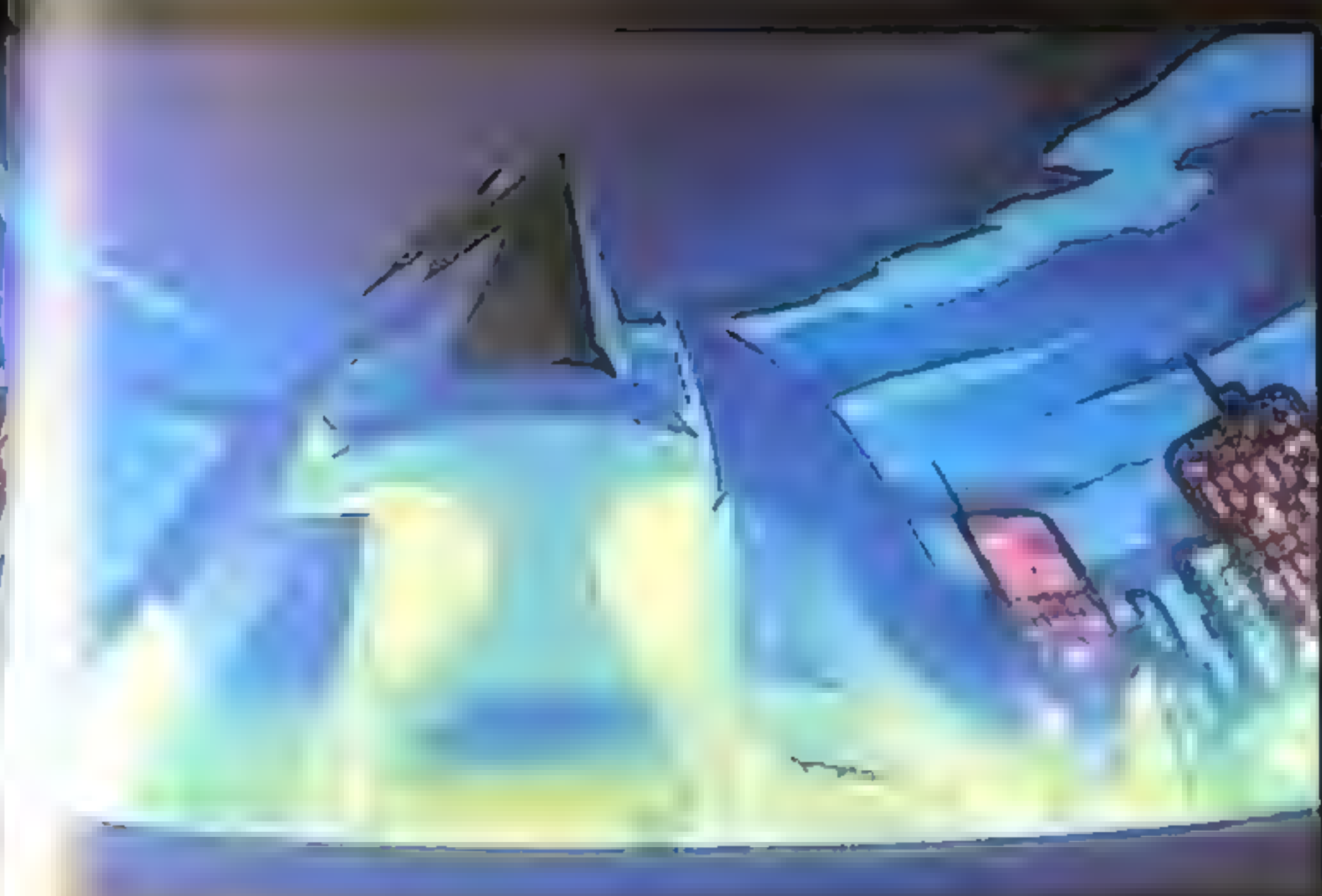




**This spread:** Background art from *Enter the Dragon*.











Even the horror-deprived animation professionals on the *Zim* crew have seen movies, however, of many varieties, textures, and tones. With the expanded emotional tone the new movie demanded, this wide spectrum of influence and experience was useful. Jake Wyatt, for example brought his own knack for action comics and action storyboarding to the team, which proved helpful for some of the high-octane sequences in the movie.

**Jake Wyatt (storyboard supervisor):** In terms of story, not just camera work, the major deviation this movie is from the series is that it is a story. The series was great, but the series was *Spy vs. Spy*. You had Dib and Zim, who were both awful idiots, and they would punish each other, and that was the series. It was awesome, and it worked really well, but it was eleven minutes for them to antagonize

each other and then punish each other in surprising ways.

This is a story about relationships and desires and insecurities and family, so part of seeing all of that emotional depth is that the camera has more work to do when we storyboard it. In contrast, part of what made the series so fun is that there were no emotional stakes. The camera was free to do whatever was most interesting visually. On *Florpus*, the camera gets conscripted to the cause of the story a lot more often. Within that, we still try to be as *Zim-y* as we can. There are moments where we mimic horror, there are moments when we try to create a sense of awe and magic—something I don't think they tried to do on the show. Not just scale, but beauty. We go to space, and space is sometimes horrifying, and space is sometimes silly and stupid, and space is sometimes beautiful. I feel like

that wasn't present in the show—things were either horrifying or funny. So we've added a little additional dimension. It's a lot of what you like from the show. But there will be more added to it, more emotional breadth and depth.

**Chris Viscardi (Executive Producer, Nickelodeon):** There is a very relatable, and oddly touching emotional story for both Zim and Dib: They both want to be seen and heard and admired by a parental figure. For Dib, it's his own father. For Zim, it's the Talon. And that emotional pull, that relatable kid-parent dynamic, works for fans of any age.

By virtue of its unique history, *Zim* is re-imaging pop culture at a distinctly different societal juncture than that in which it originally aired close to twenty years before.





Jhonen: I wonder about this special because it's a little late for it to come out. It's not how cartoons used to be. Things are generally right now—things are a lot more positive. There's a lot of positive shows out there now. I love them, and they're far more emotionally intelligent than Zim ever was, but Zim was never supposed to be that. It was always supposed to be a dark, edgy, and edgy—not because the lesson was that the audience should be cruel and vindictive, but because it assumes that you know better. That's why the stuff is funny. You laugh at this because you know he's not supposed to act like this. Zim's horrible! He's horrible! They're not presented as role models. It's kind of back in the *Beavis and Butt-Head* era. There was all this controversy about how terrible *Beavis and Butt-Head* was, but I never thought the point of the show was, "Hey, be like Beavis and Butt-Head, be like these awful people." It's like,

"Here are some people to laugh at! Laugh at these awful, awful people!"

So with this special coming out when things are perhaps vastly more sensitive, to a terrifying degree. I don't know where it belongs.

I would also think that Zim, now... it's not as funny! [laughs] It's not as funny. It's not as funny now as it used to be because it's not really parody any more. You can't really parody reality in the same way anymore because not only has reality gone further than what Zim does, but it's alarming and depressing. All the same, I don't think it should mean we should shy away from telling ugly stories and mean stories.

It's one of the first things I was thinking about when I was asked to come up with some more Zim stuff. We'll see how it goes! It's an ugly time for ugly things.

Zim, Dib, et al., never really went away; they aren't appearing out of a void. Besides living in Jhonen's head, the characters also lived on in reruns, DVD collections, and in the comic book series. The fans remained, and new generations of fans were spawned. Zim has been simmering all this time, much like "gross-Dib" (crew shorthand for Dib's disgusting model design) has been festering in his bed room, waiting for revenge. Which is where both the stories in the comics series and the new movie begin.

Animated series that enjoy a long run on television always evolve over time. Designs from one season can seem like ancient relics two seasons later. Character personalities shift, sometimes developing nuanced layers, sometimes calcifying into diminishing echoes of the original. But these evolutions happen gradually over many seasons. Without the benefit of much time before being canceled, Zim's revival could have been designed

(Continued on page 218)

This spread: This horizontal pan background is designed to create a multipane effect when moved past the animation software's "camera."

The background layer passes more rapidly through the space, creating depth with a parallax effect.





STORYBOARD THUMBNAILS

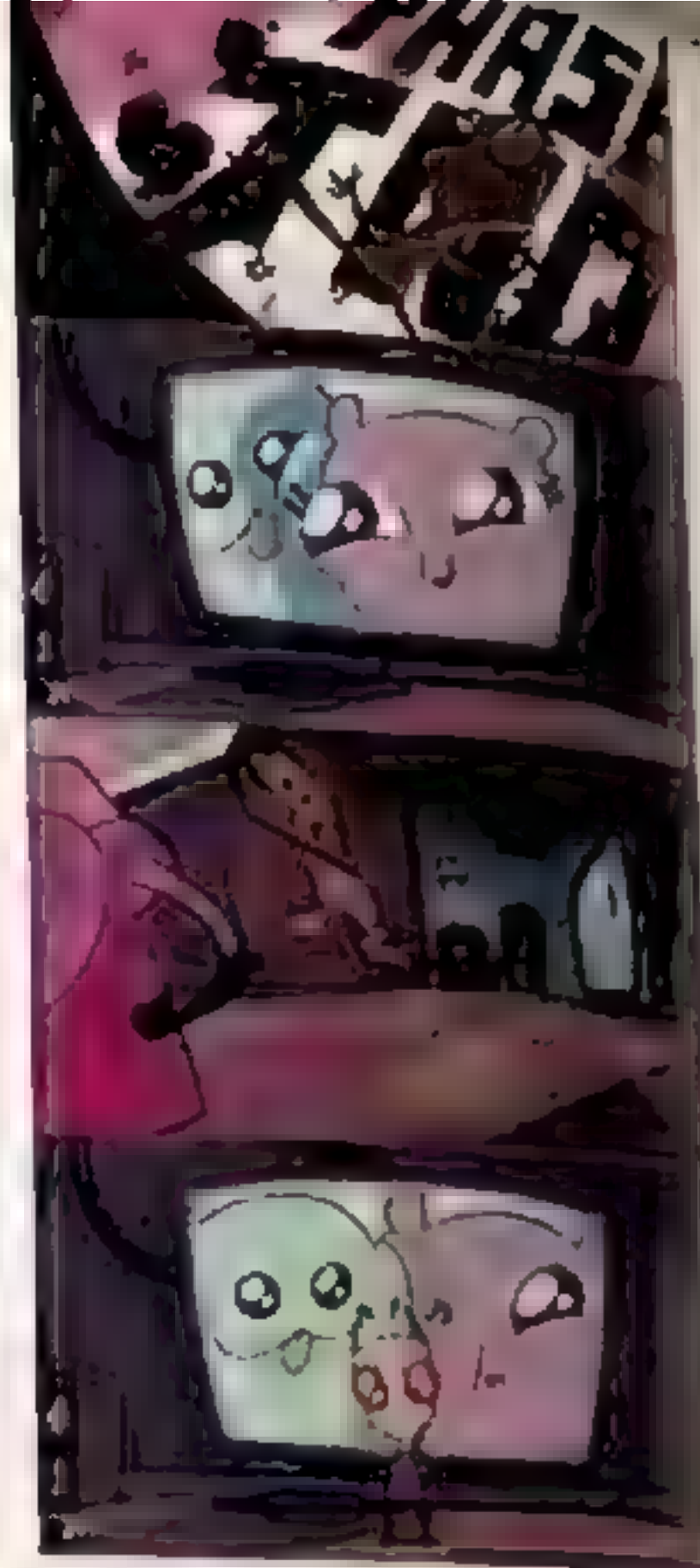
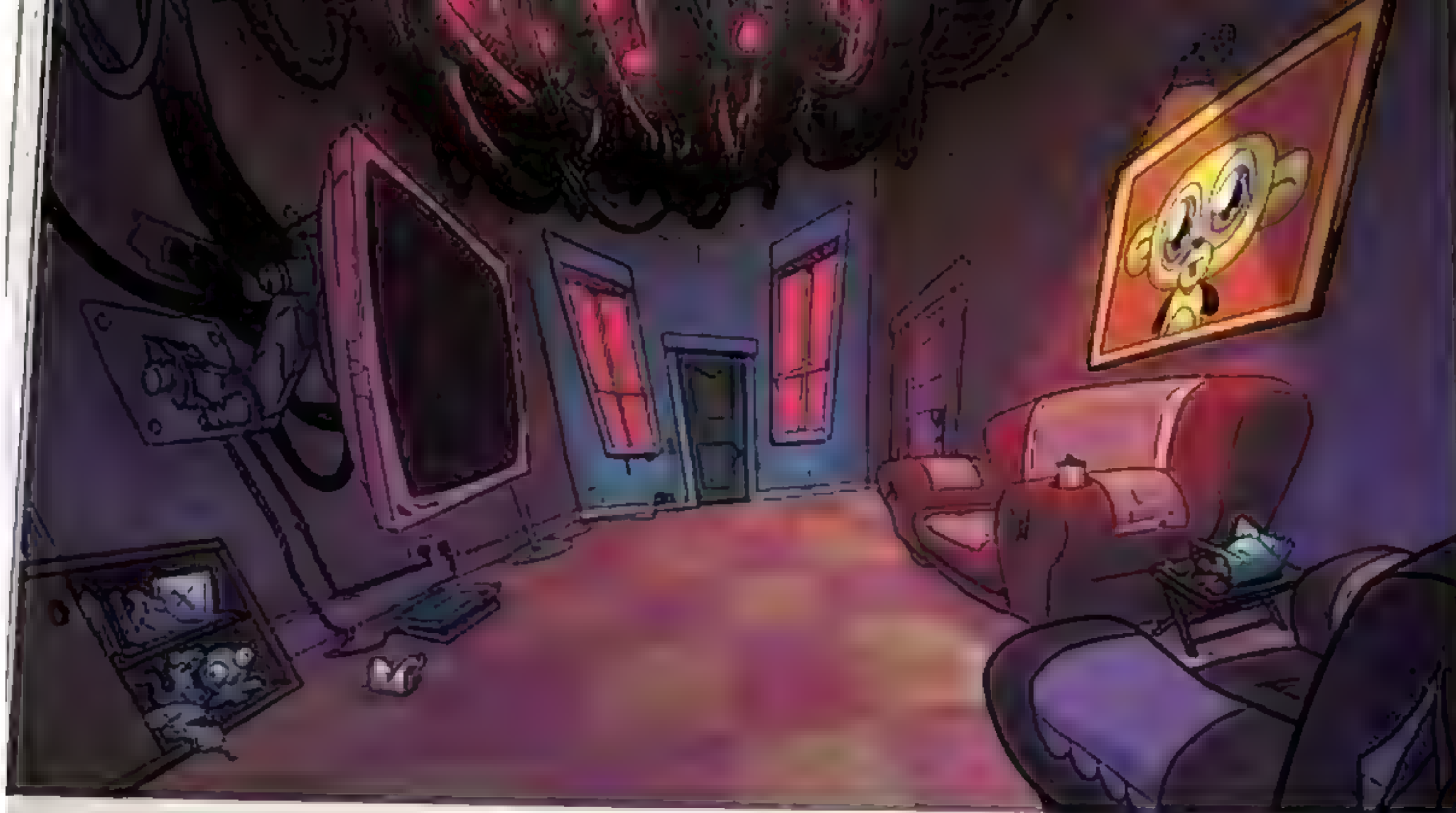




**This spread:** To conceptualize the action, storyboard supervisor John Wyatt created try thumbnails of sequences (opposite) before

moving on to fully realized storyboard panels for a chase sequence (above).





to cater to the nostalgia that the dedicated fanbase had harbored for almost two decades by faithfully recreating the original short-lived run in movie form. Or another approach might have been the reboot: an explicit reimagining of everything, typically granted a "cool" modern edge.

**Jhonen:** Honestly, how we approached this special is that this is just a continuation. It's not a reboot, it's just: "Here's more!" I didn't want it to feel like "Hey, here's some nostalgia!" because I generally can't stand that. These characters have existed in my head since the show went off the air, and this is me just picking it back up—it's not me saying, "All right world, here's the new Zim!" Instead, it's like, "Here's the old stuff, it just looks cooler"—hopefully.

Kind of like the comics, I want the general effect to be that the special is what the series would be

now if it had never gone off the air. This is what it has naturally become.

**Chris Viscardi:** People often ask why we decided to make a movie instead of new episodes, and to me it came down to wanting to elevate the characters and world of *Invader Zim* by telling a bigger story. The original series always felt bigger than the half-hour box it was squeezed into. So why not take the shackles off and let Jhonen's imagination and his adorably deviant cast of idiots run wild for the length of a ~~movie~~? That sounded like a good idea to me. And happily, Jhonen agreed.

**Jenny:** I'm hoping fans will see it's just characters that were already brilliant and stupid and funny in all the right ways, and that we've expanded upon them and given them more dimension. We explore Dib's

relationship with his dad a lot. Jhonen will shoot me for saying that it has more heart than the series ever did, but it totally does. The series was a lot more overtly mean-spirited, which I think was part of its charm, but this movie proves that you can have that mean-spiritedness but also have some genuine love in there. Not just the love of the characters but the love of the way this movie was made. This whole team loved this, we all put our whole selves into it. I think we've been able to make a more heart-filled, more saturated and rich version of what was already there. And this is coming from someone who absolutely adores the original series—I grow up on it.

### Wisdom: Achieved

Jhonen has straddled the lives of an independent comics artist and of a big animation-studio producer; he's experienced the trials of carving out a living as a visual

Above: Background artwork of Zim's house and stills from *Florpus*.





invader. The long, strange journey of Zim—from puppet through his television-movie debut—has offered several career's worth of substantive lessons, and illustrates that there is no single path to getting things produced. Like so many essential organs from our children, here are some of those lessons from Zim and Zim's story that may be harvested:

### 1. Show Me the Work

One early path to professional success has something in common with others who have also risen to prominence in comics and animation: a steady output of work. Work that shows potential for growth and a desire to keep creating it. Work that says to the world that this artist will be making art with or without a publishing or development deal, because they can't be stopped. Any publisher or producer will have their eyes on an artist's recent efforts. Evidence

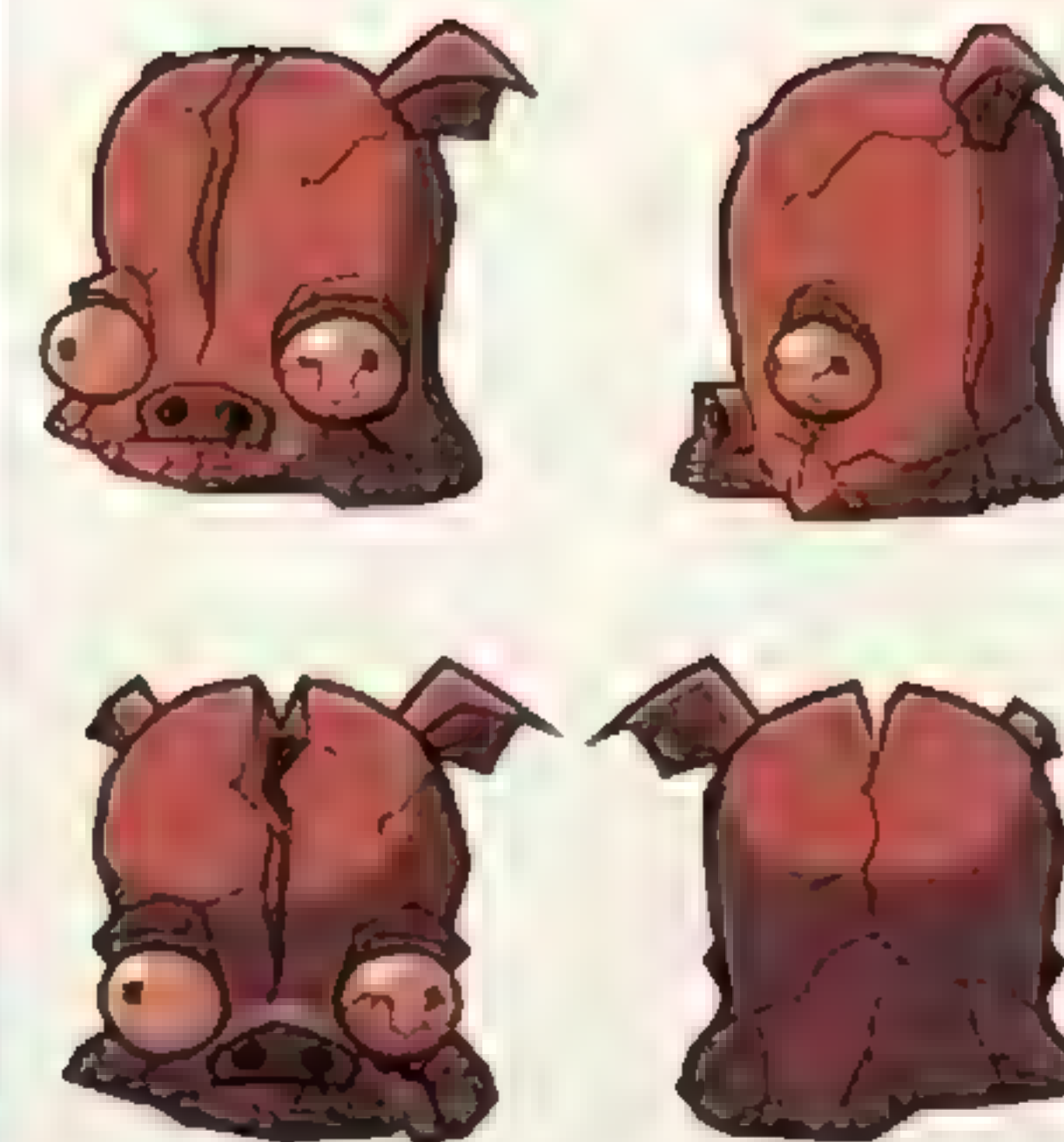
that an artist is living and breathing their artistic calling is very convincing.

### 2. Feed Your Voice

Working hard is not always enough. It takes a unique voice to rise above the masses and gain the attention of potential creative partners. In Jhonen's case, his voice was built from a foundation of obsessing over animation and film, then making comics. His varied influences set his work apart, as did his self-taught art style. Having a similarly broad and ever-deepening pool of influences can make an artist textured and unexpected, and like Jhonen, set them apart from the crowd.

### 3. Discover Your Favorite Process

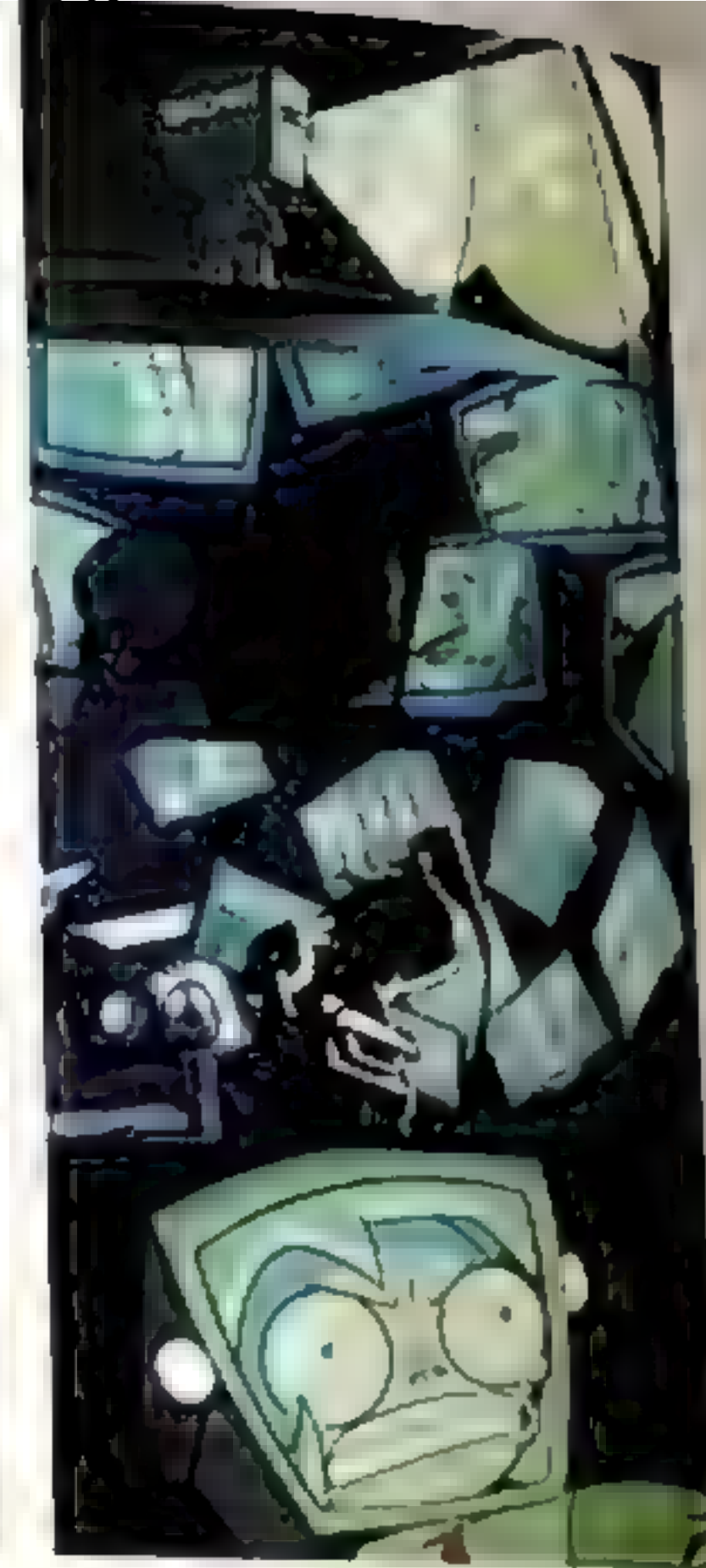
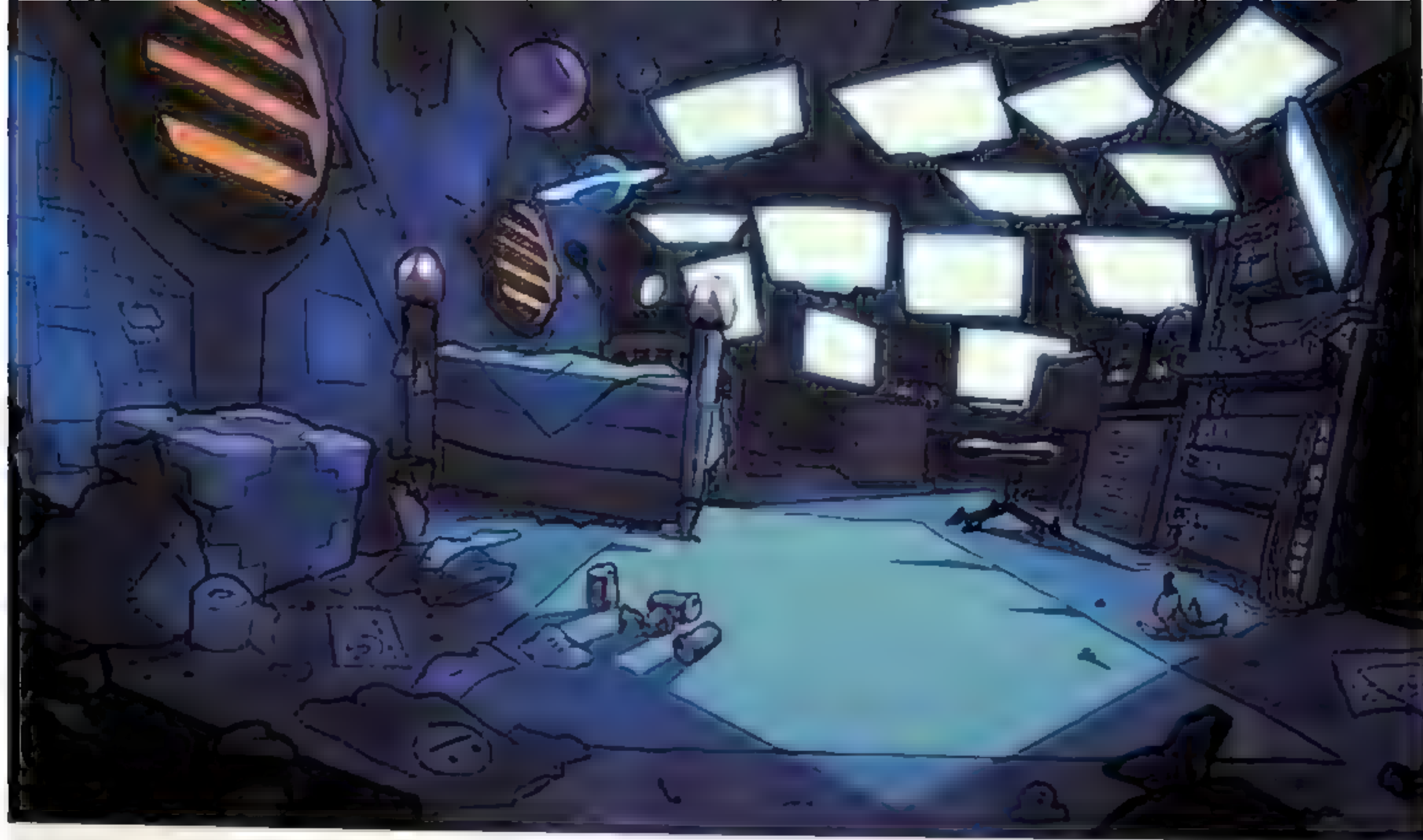
Jhonen's story illustrates that toiling alone in a home studio has its advantages: lax dress code, schedule



autonomy, easy commute from bed to desk. Free-lancing from home also often means being your own boss—sure to appeal to many creative minds. This scenario is also full of pitfalls for the type of person who is easily distracted, or prone to anxiously overworking. Working in a big studio, alternatively, offers pluses, too: free snacks, normalized hours, and human interaction. That last point is a big one. Many creative pursuits thrive through collaboration with others. Collaborating with a team will also create work with a finished, polished look and scope that is impossible to achieve alone. Jhonen's experience with both scenarios allow him insight into what parts of each make him happiest: the ability to play, improvise, and collaborate with others who are also enthusiastic or having a good time. Discover what working scenarios make you the happiest and then design projects around those processes.

Above: Stills from an in-progress version of the *Enter the Florpus* opening title animation and rotations of a Bloaty head design.





#### 4. The Process is the Point

Stories from the *Zim* series crew, comics, and movie productions remind us that for the artists behind the series, the experience of creating is paramount. Later, the debut, the premiere, the publishing, opening, posting, or sharing with the world is just dessert: a departure-rush of anticipation, hopefully followed by ego stroking (or sometimes gushing). It's thrilling, but it isn't the point—play, process, and the work itself is.

#### 5. Inner Kid First

Recalling childhood obsessions can be a good way to focus and hone the imaginations of aspiring artists. Through analysis of the movies, books, and games that they love and have loved since childhood, artists should consider how they might use the same stylistic and thematic elements from those works to evoke those similar emotions and experiences via their own work.

Pinnar's work connects with others naturally—and focus testing needed. A bonus is that by using themes and motifs that are foundational to an artist's creative development, their work will continue to engage their own enthusiasm. Jhonen's work works because it explores real childhood fears and obsessions. These ideas have deep roots.

#### The Idea Spew

**Jhonen:** *Zim* doesn't really have any logical conclusion. It can exist for as long as we can come up with ideas for it, and I don't think we're anywhere near done coming up with ideas.

**Jenny:** Jhonen is a creative juggernaut. He'll be on the toilet, and he'll come out with five new ideas, and I'll be like, "WHAT? HOW?!" They just fall out of him, it's ridiculous. No one should have that much power. [laughs]

As long as Jhonen keeps spewing out ideas, *Zim*'s themes and tone are inevitably going to be out there, because he can't help but infuse these themes of stupidity and extraterrestrials and living houses into his work. He loves these things, and they just got into everything that he does. Whether or not *Zim* lives on, the themes will be there in Jhonen's future.

**Jhonen:** *Zim* is just a repository for all of these ideas, all of these fascinations and obsessions that I still have mainly from being a kid. I don't know if that's what resonates with people, I haven't investigated what people relate to. But so much of that stuff comes from things that I thought were funny a long, long time ago. Being a little kid and laughing at things that I thought were interesting... and now they are my life!

Above: Background art of Di's bedroom and kids from *Flopus*

Opposite: Background art from *Flopus*





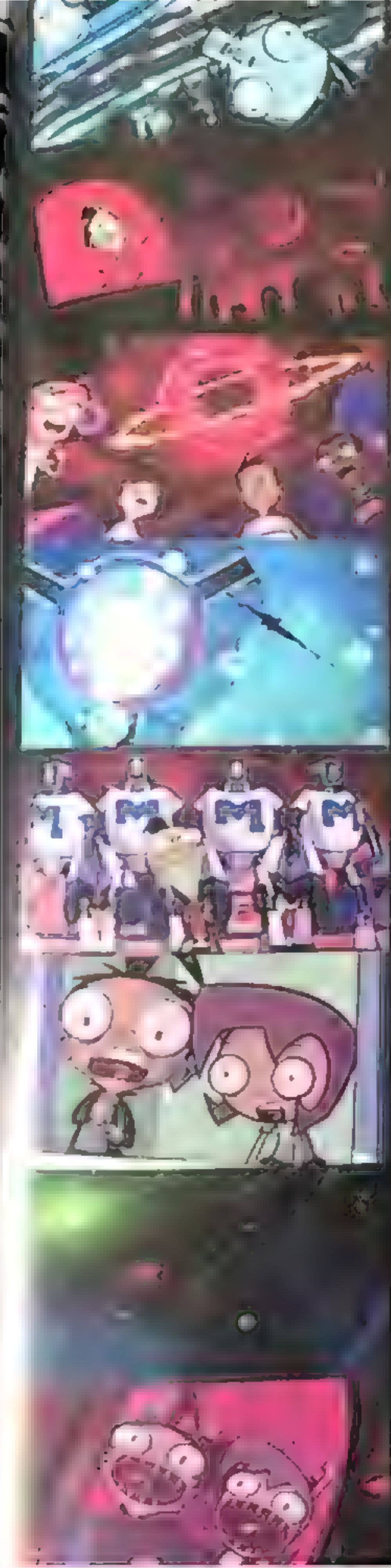




This scene was created by Background art  
from Enter the Florus.



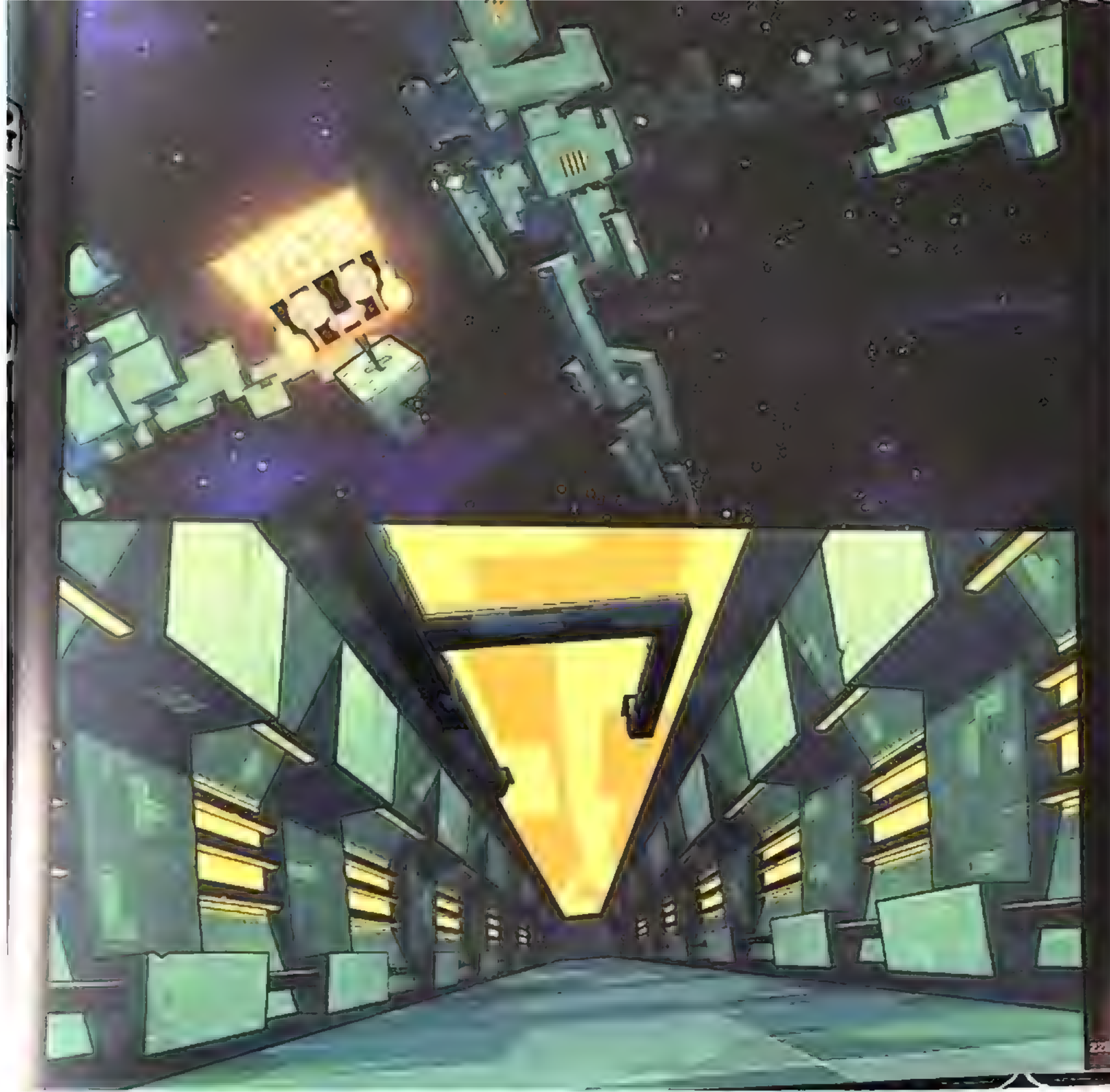




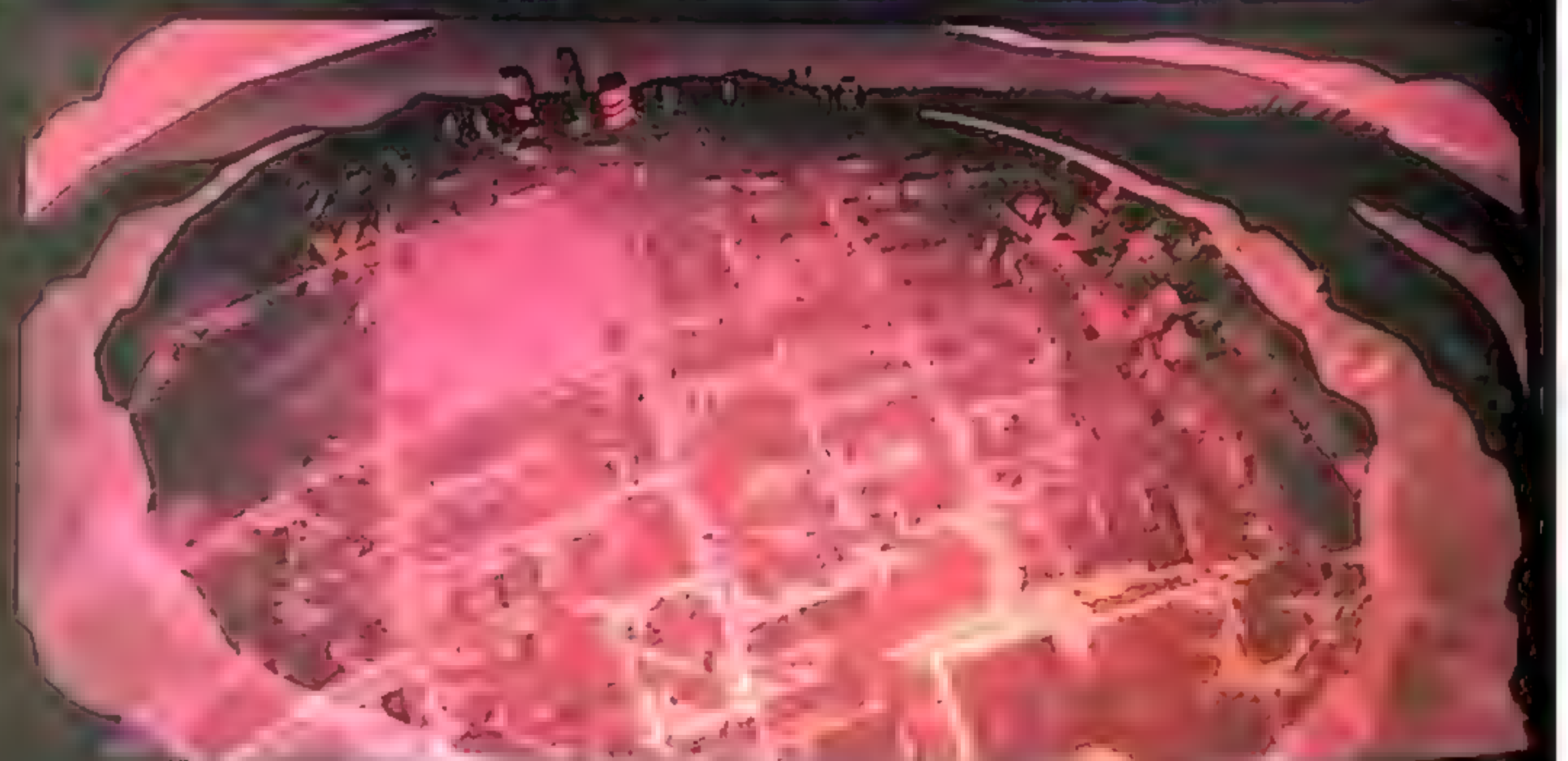






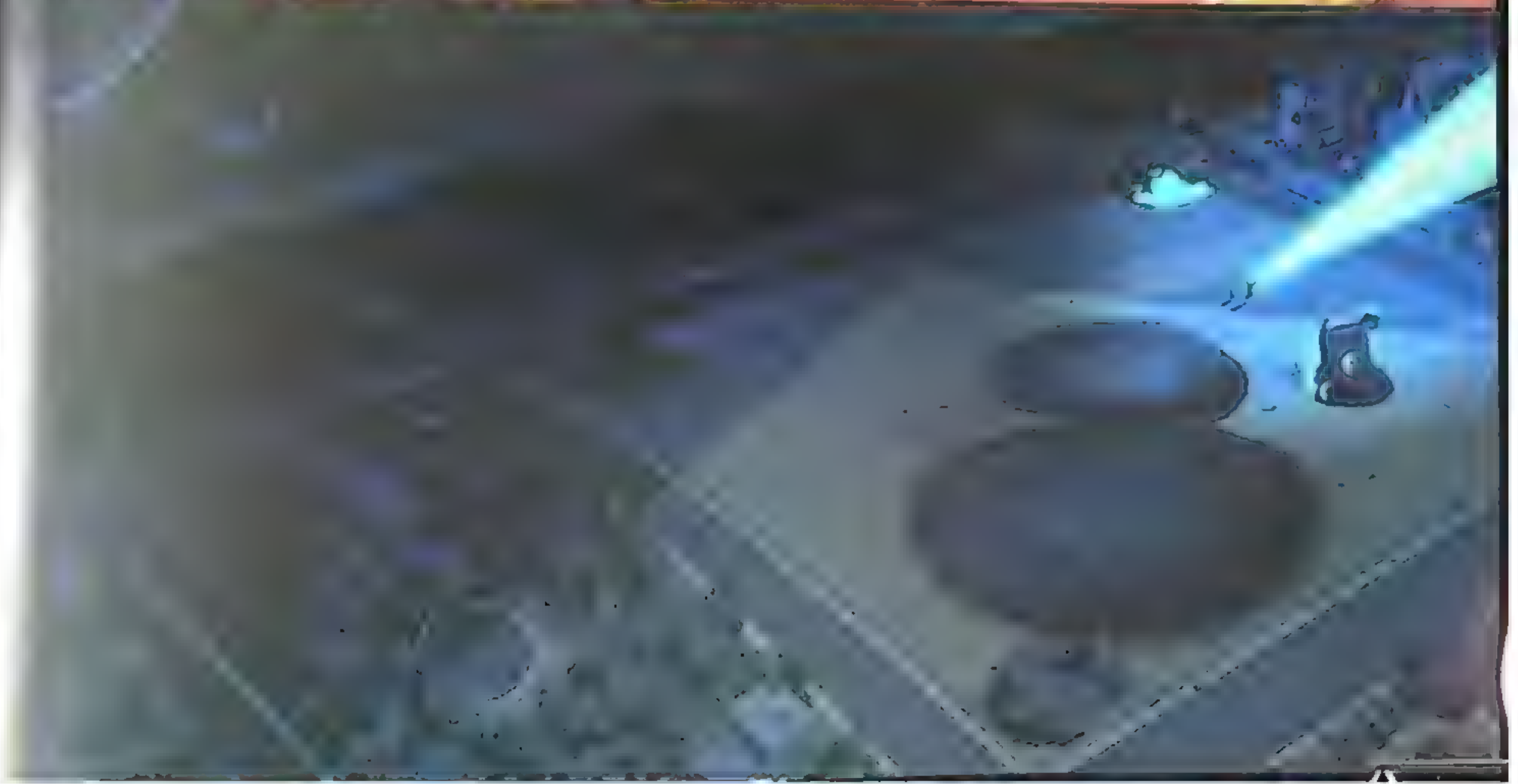
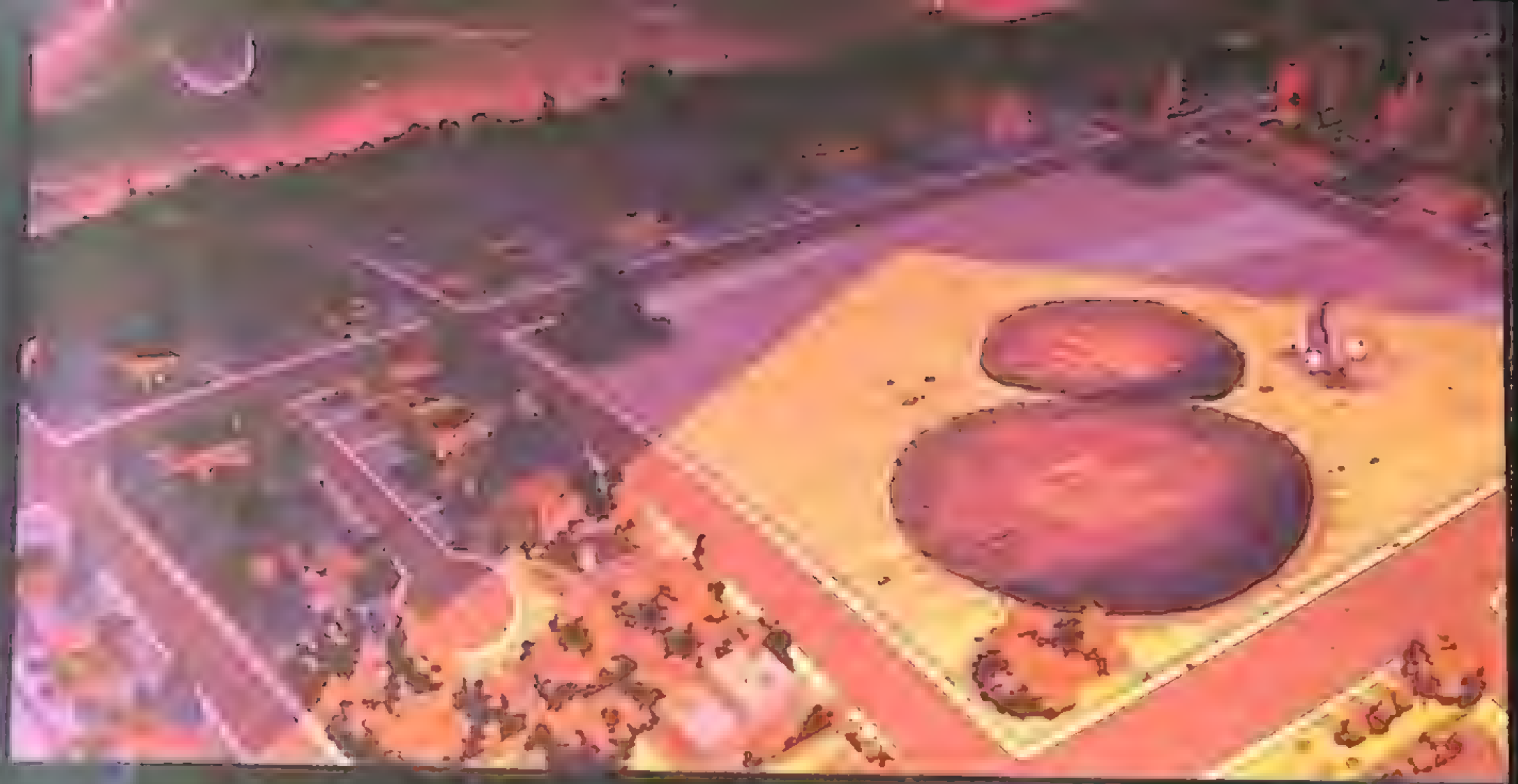






Background art from  
Enter the Dragon



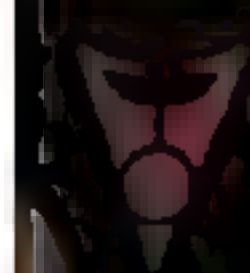






PRISON SPACE VERSION

● NEON



## PROP DESIGNS

Above: A Jhonen sketch (far left) and the prop model that was designed based off it.





This spread: Various prep designs from Enter the Gungeon.



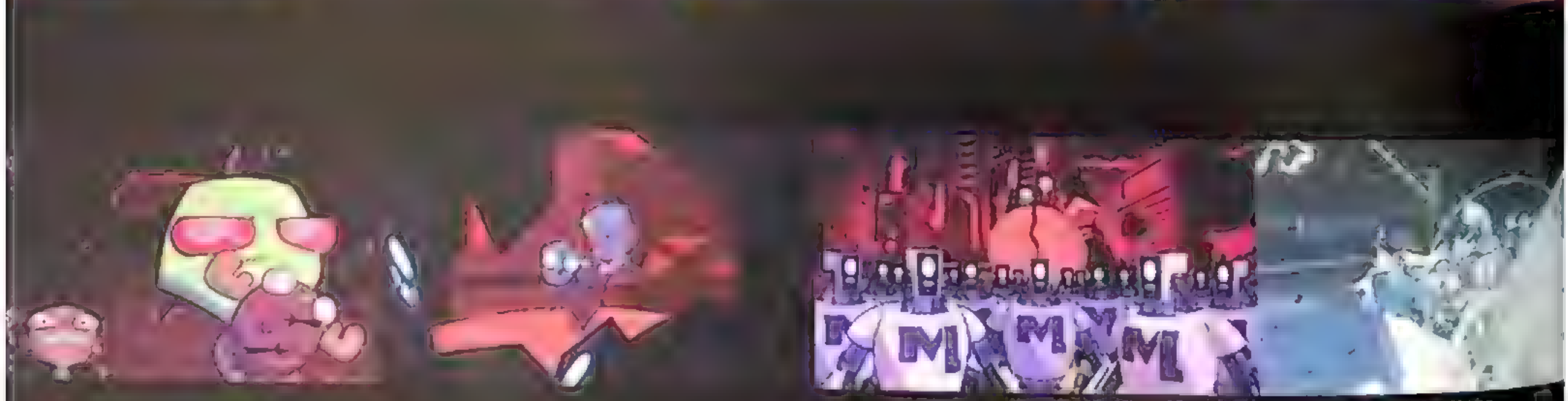






This spread. Background art and various prop designs from *Enter the Nexus*.





Background art and  
side from Enter the Florpus.















**CREATED BY**  
Jhonen Vasquez

**HEAD WRITERS**  
Jhonen Vasquez  
Frank Conniff

**STORY EDITOR**  
Rob Hummel

**WRITTEN BY**  
Jhonen Vasquez  
Rob Hummel  
Eric Truheart  
Roman Disge  
Courtney Lilly  
Danielle Koenig

**DIRECTED BY**  
Steven Ressel

**STORYBOARD BY**  
Kyle Menke  
Shawn Murray  
Rayfield Angram  
Louie Del Carmen  
Chris Graham  
Ian Graham  
Bryan Konietzko  
Ron Brewer  
Joseph Daniello  
Dave Kroecker  
Rayfield Angram  
Joseph Daniello  
Miyuki Hoshikawa  
Steven Ressel  
Greg Colton  
Perry Zombolas

**EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS**  
Mary Harrington  
Jhonen Vasquez

**PRODUCER**  
Steven Ressel

**LINE PRODUCERS**  
Monique Beatty  
Christine Griswold

**ORIGINAL MUSIC BY**  
Kevin Manthei

**END CREDIT MUSIC BY**  
Kevin Manthei

**MAIN TITLE THEME MUSIC BY**  
Mark Tortorici

**CAST**  
Brad Abrell  
Dee Bradley Baker  
Adam Baldwin  
Matt Ballard  
Andy Berman  
Lucille Bliss  
Joelyn Blue  
S. Scott Bullock  
Rodger Bumpass  
Robert Cant  
Bill Chott  
Mo Collins  
Frank Conniff  
Danny Cooksey  
Olivia d'Abo  
John de Lancie  
John DiCristo  
Greg Ellis  
R. Lee Erney  
Melissa Fahn  
Gary Falcone  
Kathryn Fiore  
Dave Fouquette  
Lauri Fraser  
John Garry  
Brian George  
James Gleason  
Paul Greenberg  
David Herman  
Richard Horvitz  
Sherman Howard  
Rob Izenberg  
Jeffrey Jones  
Janice Kawaye  
Kerri Kenney  
Danielle Koenig  
Phil LaMarr  
Hupe Levy  
Jason Marsden  
Kevin Hamilton McDonald  
Michael McDonald  
Diane Michelle  
Candi Milo  
Adam Paul  
Ted Raimi  
Kevin Michael Richardson

Phedee Sampler  
Mary Scheer  
Eliza Jane Schneider  
Dwight Schultz  
Mr. Scolex  
Rosearik Rikki Simons  
Andre Sogliuzzo  
Antoinette Spolar  
Philip Tanzini  
Fred Tatasciore  
Eric Truheart  
Jhonen Vasquez  
Wally Wingert  
Jim Wise

**CASTING DIRECTOR**  
Donna Grillo Gonzales

**CASTING COORDINATOR**  
Anna Henry

**"DARK HARVEST" STORY  
IDEA BY**  
Arthur Montmorency

**"GAME SLAVE 2" STORY IDEA BY**  
Roman Disge

**STORYBOARD SUPERVISOR**  
Louie Del Carmen

**ADDITIONAL STORYBOARD  
ARTISTS**  
Steve Ressel  
Jhonen Vasquez  
Todd Britton

**STORYBOARD REVISIONISTS**  
Joseph Daniello  
Miyuki Hoshikawa  
Tina Kugler  
Louie Del Carmen  
Maureen Mascarina  
Lothell Jones  
Warren Lee  
Colin Heck  
Scott Leberecht  
Brent Woods

**ORIGINAL CHARACTER DESIGN**  
Jhonen Vasquez

**CHARACTER DESIGN**  
John Fountain  
Aaron Alexovich

**ART DIRECTOR**  
Bryan Konietzko

**PROP DESIGN**  
Tasoo Kim  
Eric Brown  
Jeff Wong

**FX DESIGN**  
Kathleen Quail

**DESIGN CLEAN-UP**  
Aaron Alexovich  
Jin Sur  
Su Moon

**BACKGROUND DESIGN**  
Spencer G. Davis  
Maurice F. Morgan II  
Bryan Konietzko  
Jairo Lizama  
Jannita Trammell

**BACKGROUND CLEAN-UP**  
Jin Sur  
Laura Gray

**COLOR DIRECTOR**  
Jean-Paul Bondy

**COLOR DESIGNERS**  
Chris Haynie  
Kersti Myrberg  
Ron Russell  
Rosearik Rikki Simons  
Peter Ehrlich  
Addis Haghnazarian

**TIMING SUPERVISOR**  
Don Judge  
Ken Bruce

**ASSISTANT TIMING SUPERVISOR**  
Ken Bruce

**TIMING DIRECTOR**  
Ken Bruce

**ASSISTANT TIMING DIRECTOR**  
Juh Hashiguchi

**SHEET TIMERS**  
Ken Bruce  
Charlie Cooper  
Juh Hashiguchi  
Steve Ressel  
Robert Hughes  
Soonjin Mooney  
Elizabeth Kwon  
Phil Cummings



**SERIES CREDITS**



**ANIMATIC SUPERVISOR**  
Paul Finn

**ANIMATIC DIRECTOR**  
Ted Machold

**ANIMATIC EDITOR**  
Ted Machold

Kevin Zelah  
Jen E. Lara

**TRACK READERS**  
Michael Edmonds  
Marc Honess  
Jash Montes

**FINAL CHECKER**  
William K. Exter

**CGI ANIMATION BY**  
Nak Digital

**SPECIAL THANKS TO**  
Alison Dexter  
Igel Krasnowe

**CG DIRECTOR**  
John Sore

**CG SUPERVISOR**  
John Sore  
Hanzhi Tang  
Lewin Strougo

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Designer: Chris McDonnell  
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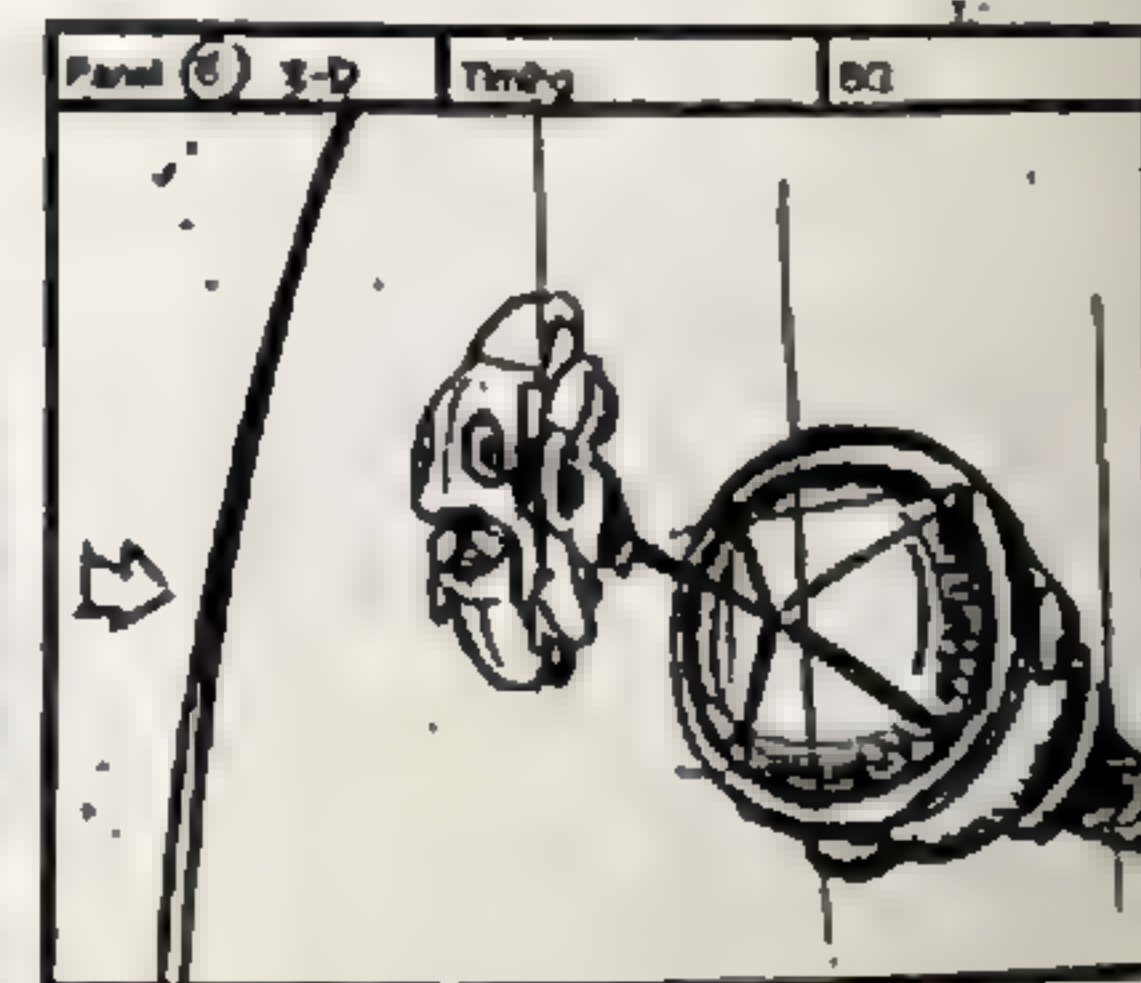
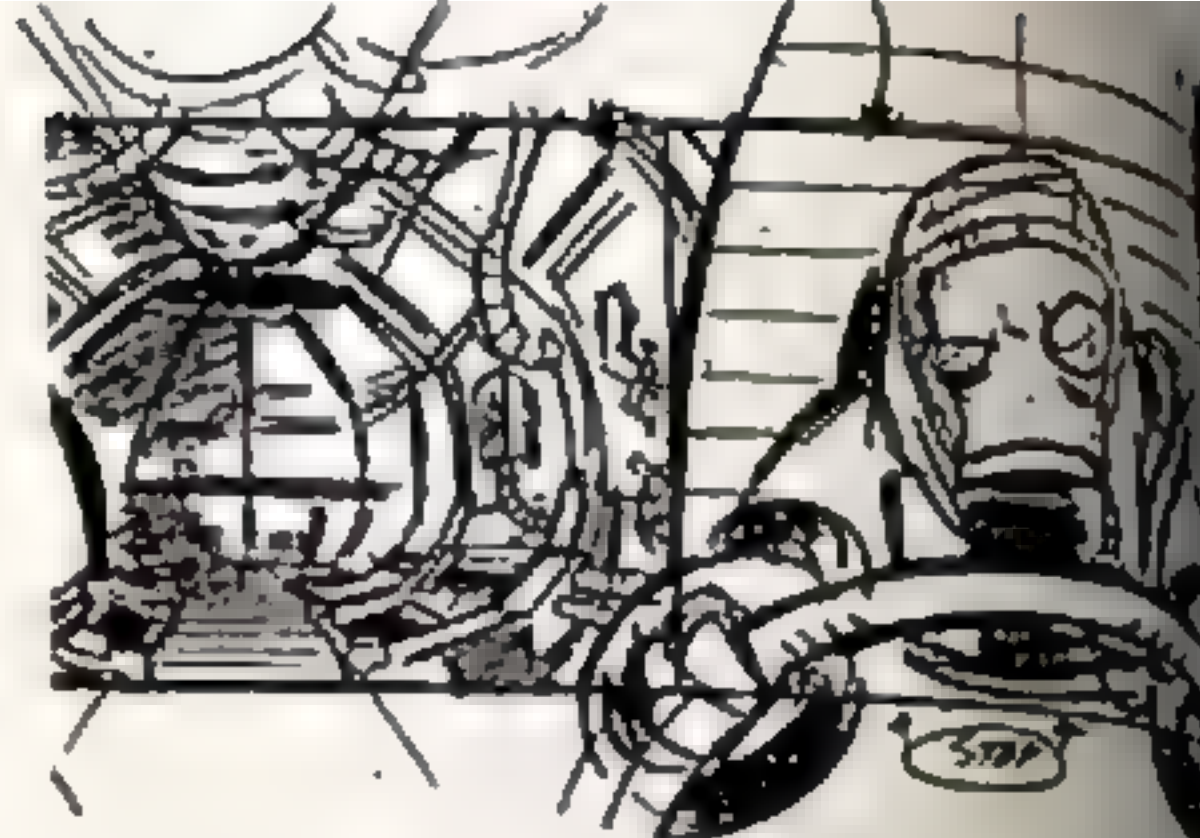
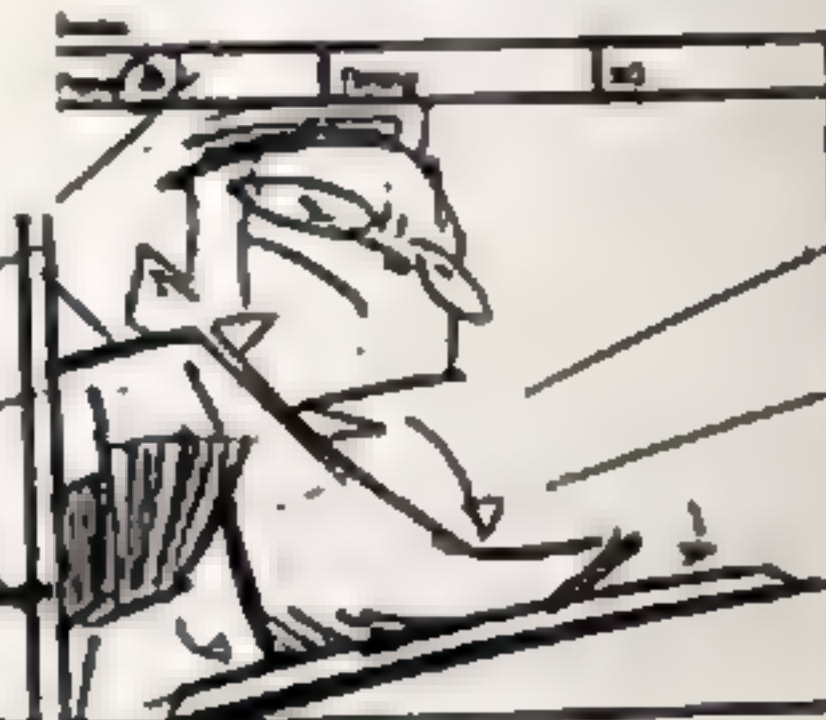
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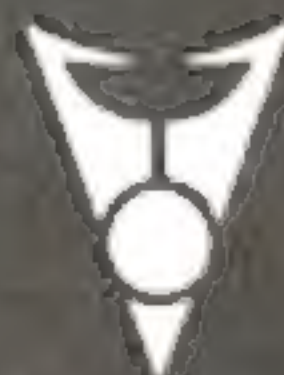
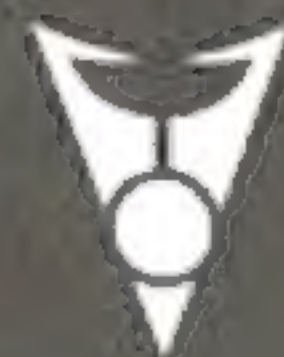
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Chris McDonnell, Philadelphia, June 2019

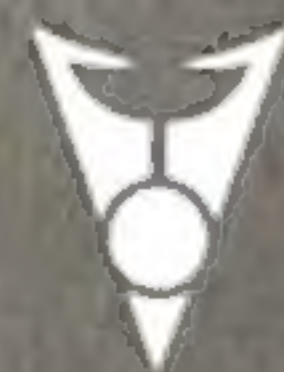
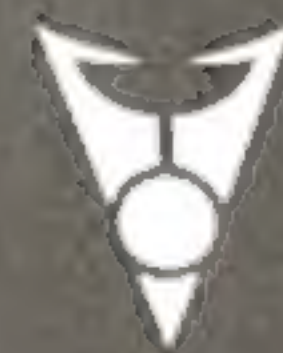
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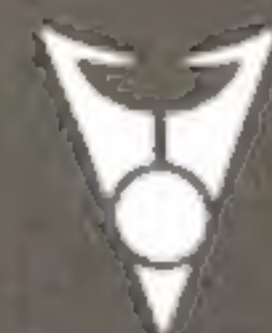
















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